

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Seekers and new church participants are a motley crew. Some will come with little understanding of the church or its history. Some will arrive with stereotypes of how a church approaches honoring the body, and some may also have some underlying assumptions from mainstream culture about how we ought to honor the body. There may be some participants in this group who are health savvy with well established habits or routines (practices) for caring for their bodies but who, as adults, have learned to live more in the head or intellect than in the body. This is a time to tease out stereotypes and assumptions while discovering how to approach the honoring of our bodies from a God perspective.

You may want to explore a variety of settings other than a church building for the activities, such as coffee shops, restaurants, homes, or parks. Take into consideration the activity itself, your locale, the weather, and the mood you wish to set for the activities.

About this Exploration

God not only creates our bodies but also relates to us through the embodied form of Jesus Christ. We are moved to reclaim God's presence in the joyful and messy details of everyday life, a task more complicated and richer than depicted in the idealized images of bodies in the media. Through the senses, we experience and explore creation. We enjoy the sight of a rainbow, the smell of roses, or the taste of garlic. We connect with one another through the sound of a voice, the touch of a

handshake, or the intimacy of a kiss. We can choose to use our bodies in ways that affirm that we are made in the image of God, discover that God's goodness is planted within our bodies, and express ourselves through our varied talents and limitations.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 19:4-8
John 4:1-42

Leader Preparation

Be attentive to the location in which you will facilitate these gatherings. If you are meeting in a room that you can rearrange, create a space that welcomes people who do not attend church regularly. De-clutter and tidy it. You may wish to pin or tape up the artwork you will use. Set up chairs or cushions in a circle in order to maximize discussion and the connections among participants. You may wish to have a focal point in the center of the circle with colorful fabric of different textures along with items that appeal to several senses—maybe a chime, a plant, a potpourri of natural scents such as lemon or cinnamon, or a candle.

When the participants arrive, greet them and invite them into the room by name. Encourage them to mingle with one another. You may wish to take time at the beginning of your first activity to have them introduce themselves by name and to share one thing about themselves, such as what movie best characterizes their life or their favorite vacation. You may wish to provide drinks and/or snack foods as a gesture of hospitality.

The leadership style will be more facilitative in which you partner with the participants by inviting discussion, questions, doubts, curiosity, and allowing space for humor. Provide a

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Honoring (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think of the ways you care for your body—food, hygiene, activity, and sleep. Are you able to pinpoint why you care for your body the way you do? Do you practice routines picked up from childhood, something your parents or grandparents taught you? Are there different routines you picked up from friends at college or through work?

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Welcome the participants and invite them to think about the ways they care for their bodies by having them focus on how many meals they eat, what kinds of food they eat, how much and what kinds of activity and exercise they get, and how many hours they generally sleep.

Have the participants divide themselves into groups of three or four people for discussion. After they are in their smaller groups, ask: *What patterns of care have you developed for your body, and where did you learn them?* Be sure that all the members of each small group have time to respond to this question. Give them several minutes.

After the small group discussions, gather participants back into the larger circle. Invite any who wish to share their comments with the larger group.

Then move the focus to the subject of this Faith Practice, “Honoring the Body.” Invite the learners to share what they hope to receive from this gathering, whether for just today or over the course of the other meetings. Sample questions include these.

- What brought you to this session?
- What interests you about the faith practice of honoring the body?
- What issues do you want to explore as we pursue this faith practice?
- What questions do you bring to this exploration?
- What do you think is the connection between faith and our bodies?

List their ideas and questions on the newsprint or whiteboard. Keep this list posted in the meeting space for future discussion. Continue to check the list occasionally to be sure that you are attentive to their questions and concerns.

2 Seeing

Leader preparation: Read the story of John 4:1–42. Pay particular attention to the scene at the well between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

On newsprint or a whiteboard write:

Honoring the Body

SEEKERS & NEW CHURCH PARTICIPANTS

welcoming and safe environment for differences of opinions to emerge, and allow each learner to learn and evolve at his or her own pace.

Prayer: We praise you, O God, for these bodies that you have formed out of the dust of the earth. Bless me and the participants as we gather to discover your presence in the joyful and messy details of our everyday lives. Help us honor our own bodies— young and old, healthy or ill—with all of our differing abilities and capabilities. For you, O God, have blessed us by coming to us in bodily form, most fully in the life of Jesus. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help participants engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

Judea and Samaria
Jews and Samaritans
Jacob
Prophet
Messiah

You will want to help the learners know basic definitions so the story makes sense.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- video: “Life Giving Water,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oejtEc28KiU&feature=related>

Welcome the learners and let them know that they will be watching part of a story about Jesus and a Samaritan woman from the Gospel of John.

Point out the words on the newsprint or whiteboard. Review these words for clarification. Invite the participants to add what they understand about these words.

- Judea and Samaria are two countries.
- Jews and Samaritans are the peoples of the two countries. Both were originally one people, the Israelites, who divided into a southern kingdom and a northern kingdom.
- Jacob is the grandson of Abraham and Sarah, whose story is told in the Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Scriptures, and who are the father and mother of the Israelite people.
- A prophet is a person who acts as an intermediary for God, bringing God’s word and message to people.
- “Messiah” is the Hebrew word for Christ, which means one who comes to save the people.

Watch the video together, and then invite discussion by using these focus points.

- Jesus used the phrase “living water.” Read John 4:10–14 to help remember this part of the conversation. What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase “living water”? (Accept both literal and spiritual interpretations.)
- Jesus was Jewish and the woman was a Samaritan. In the video, she could tell he was Jewish by his clothing. What religious groups of people today distinguish themselves through clothing? What are some other ways people use to distinguish themselves as belonging to a particular group of people? (Tattoos, makeup, hairstyles, body piercings)
- If we understand Jesus as being God living in the flesh, what does Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman tell us about God?
- As we think of honoring the body, does this passage and video help us to determine how we honor differences?



3 Smelling

Leader preparation: This activity requires 60 minutes (the length of time to make and bake the bread). Start with this activity for 15 minutes. While the bread bakes, do three or four other activities that will last 45 minutes. Leave about five minutes at the end for the remainder of this activity. In planning for this activity, make sure you have the space and the equipment for the size group you will have.

You will need a kitchen or a room with clean tables big enough for three or four learners to form a group to make one loaf of bread. You will need oven(s) for baking the bread. You will also need to have enough bowls, measuring cups and spoons, baking pans and ingredients for each group. Set up the kitchen or the room for making the soda bread, gathering the equipment and ingredients in the different spots you want each group to be. To save time, you may wish to pre-measure the ingredients so that all the learners will have to do is put all the ingredients into one bowl and then mix, knead, and shape.

Print the handout “Soda Bread,” one for each group. Set out potholders and racks for the bread to cool on.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–9 to become familiar with this story about the prophet Elijah. King Ahab, an Israelite, and Queen Jezebel, a foreigner who worshiped other gods, ruled Israel when Elijah was a prophet.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Soda Bread,” Attachment: Activity 3
- bowls and stirring spoons, measuring cups and spoons,
- ingredients as listed on recipe, Attachment: Activity 3
- soapy water for cleaning up
- cooking timer
- knives to slice bread
- bags to send the bread home with learners
- (optional) butter or olive oil to dip bread in

Explain that Elijah was a prophet who was fleeing from a queen who threatened his life. Then read 1 Kings 19:4–9.

Ask if anyone has baked any kind of bread before. Identify any experienced bakers.

Invite the participants to divide into groups of three or four people, with at least one experienced baker in each group. Provide for ways to wash hands in preparation for making bread. Ask them to divide the tasks of reading directions, measuring, mixing within each group, with only one person from each group to be in charge of getting the bread in and out of the oven.

Walk among participants as they mix, knead, shape, and place the dough in the pans. When all of the breads are ready to be placed in the oven(s) do so all at once, setting the timer and assigning it to one of the bakers. While the bread bakes, move to another activity.

When the timer goes off, interrupt the activity in which you are involved for the learners to take their breads out of the oven. Let the loaves cool while you finish the interrupted activity and any other activity you have chosen to do. When you are ready to end your session together, come back to finish this activity.

Invite the learners to gather in their groups by their bread as you again read 1 Kings 19:4–9. Ask the following questions: *How did it feel to bake bread together with others, some of whom you may have just met? Of what memory did the smell of baking bread remind you?*

Before the learners depart, invite them to divide the breads among themselves and take some home. If there is time and the learners are inclined, take time to eat and share it together.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Touching (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about touch, including how you use touch with other people and pets and how often you are touched. There is a difference in frequency of touch according to whether we are married or single, whether we have babies or teenaged children, and whether we have pets. People in nursing homes or hospitals experience both the impersonal touch or healing touch. The acceptance or expectation of touch among people also varies depending on what region of the country we live and if we are part of an ethnic group that values or expects touch.

Create a space that will allow a circle so that learners will be able to do a brief massage. Because of past abuse issues or sensitive skin, sore muscles, or arthritic hands, there may be some people who do not want to be part of a group massage. Invite them to be observers. If no one opts out, you may wish to be part of the group massage, too.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the group to define good touch and bad touch. Write their responses on newsprint or a whiteboard, and, if need be, why they define it as good or bad. Help the learners think about touch in the various contexts of their life: home, work, school, during gatherings with friends, while out exercising, or during a leisure activity.

Ask: During the course of a normal day, with whom do you exchange more personal or intimate touch, and how does that touch happen? Examples might include a goodbye kiss in the morning with partner before heading off to work, bathing a baby, putting lotion on one's self, receiving a lick from their dog, a cat jumping on a lap, shaking hands with a colleague, patting someone's shoulder for a job well done, and so forth. Invite discussion about the frequency and types of touch acceptable among people of different ethnicities or from different countries or regions of North America.

Let the learners know that you will be asking them to offer a brief shoulder massage to the person sitting on either side of them. If anyone is uncomfortable with or not able to receive this type of touch, invite them to observe. Then invite the learners to stand, if they are able, and turn to the right so that they are facing the back of the person in front of them. Have each offer a brief shoulder massage to the person in front. Then have the learners turn to the left and offer a brief shoulder massage to the person to the left.

Talk about this exercise by asking:

- How did that feel? Good?
- Was anyone uncomfortable with the touch?
- What helps determine what is a safe touch?
- Does anyone feel like she or he gets too much touch in her or his life?
- Does anyone feel like she or he gets too little touch in her or his life?

5 Hearing

Leader preparation: Most churches have a box of percussion instruments. They might be children's instruments, but bring them out. These might include triangles, sticks, drums, tambourines, and so forth. Play the instruments and check out their different sounds, especially if you have drums. Check out the different noises that can happen if you tap them with your fingers, with your palms, or with a drum stick. And check out the different sounds that occur when striking the middle or the edge of the drum and so forth. Percussion can also be made by clapping or slapping hands on our thighs, our chests, our cheeks with our mouths open, or on tables, chairs and walls, as well as when stomping on the floor.

Figure out different beats you will want to use. For the first round you may wish to use an Oom-pa-pa beat, by having one side of the room do the "Oom" and the other side of the room doing the "pa-pa." Change it up so that the beats are different from time to time.

Bring a CD player and a couple different songs that will evoke different moods. Be attentive to what instruments are used in each song you choose, so that when you ask the question of the participants you will be able to help them identify the sounds.

Supplies:

- percussion instruments for most, if not all, participants
- CD player and 2 different pieces of music to play

Pick up a drum and demonstrate the different sounds that can come from it. Then invite each learner to choose an instrument. Have the participants sit in a circle. Divide the circle in half. Instruct the learners on your left side to play a steady beat with their instruments. Demonstrate the pace with your clapping hands or the instrument you have. Then direct the learners on the right side to do a different beat, demonstrating again. Have them play together. At some point, have them play quietly; at another point have them play loudly. Vary the pace also, inviting them to play more slowly and then more quickly.

Then stop their music and invite everyone with a drum to do the steady beat while all other instruments do a different beat.

Do a couple more variations, using different beats, different pitches, different paces. Have the learners swap their instruments with each other.

After you finish, ask the learners to put their percussion instruments back in the box. Ask the participants how their bodies feel and what their emotions are (tingly hands, happy). Then invite them to be attentive to their emotions as they listen to the two different types of music you have picked out.

Play the first piece of music. When it is finished, invite the learners to describe what emotions this music evoked. *What instruments were played that evoked those emotions?*

Then play the second piece of music. Again, invite the participants to describe what emotions this music evoked, and what instruments were played that brought out those emotions.

Ask the participants which piece they liked best. Why? Ask also if they have a preference for listening to music or playing music. Why do they have that preference?

Invite them to imagine a world without sound. How would emotions be evoked if they only watched a television show or movie in silence? *What would it be like to be out in nature yet not hear the wind move through the leaves of a tree or the water of the stream trickle over the rocks? What might it be like to not hear the voice of your child or your partner or spouse? How would you catch a deaf person's attention?*

6 Working

Leader preparation: Think about work, careers, and vocations, including parents who intentionally stay at home to care for their children. How important are our jobs? Think of how often we introduce ourselves and make ourselves known to another person through what we do and what our jobs are. Think of how work structures time and segregates people by age and by class.

In approaching this activity, focus on 1 Kings 19:4, using “wilderness” as a metaphor for how an unemployed or underemployed person might feel. Have care in how you address unemployment if you have any unemployed or underemployed people in your group, so that no shame or guilt is evoked.

Prominently display the artwork “Out of Work” in your space.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: “Out of Work” by Käthe Kollwitz, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

Invite participants to spend time studying “Out of Work” by Käthe Kollwitz. After a while, ask them to share what feelings this scene evokes.

Divide into smaller groups to share with one another about their jobs, current or past; about how their job(s) structures other aspects of their lives, such as their eating, sleeping, and socializing habits; and about their ability to “de-stress.” or take time away for mental health, illness, death, or vacations. Give each person several minutes to share.

When time is up, gather the attention of the small groups by asking if anyone wishes to share with the larger group.

Read 1 Kings 19:4. Invite the learners to think about unemployment, as exemplified both in the artwork and, with high unemployment in recent years, among their friends and family or their colleagues’ friends and families.

Write the word “wilderness” on the newsprint or a whiteboard, and ask the learners to throw out words or phrases that connect a wilderness experience with the unemployment experience. (Examples: feeling left out, bewildered, deserted, empty, lost, fearful, alone, or having no sense of value) Add the words to the newsprint.

Pause to allow time for participants to look at the words on the newsprint. Invite them to imagine jobs and money from a God perspective. *Would more or less value be placed on jobs and money? (God values people. God gives every person valued gifts to share.) What's most important when we think about people and jobs or joblessness? (Establishing relationships of compassion, creating ways of allowing everyone to share their God-given gifts, working for just structures so that everyone is able to earn money to provide for their needs of a home, food and healthy well-being)*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Dancing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Everyone probably knows “Do the Hokey Pokey.” This is to be a fun activity, reconnecting with childhood ways of being in the body and allowing movement. Push back chairs to create space to do this activity.

If you have any learners with ambulatory difficulties, make allowances for this in the movements you suggest to use in the song; include facial and upper-body movements as well as total body movements.

Supplies: None

Ask participants if they know this song and where they remember dancing it. Invite them to push back their chairs and to gather in a circle. Do several verses of the song, starting out with the easiest. Watch how you pace it so everyone is able to be part of it.

You put your right arm in, you put your right arm out.
You put your right arm in, and shake it all about.
Do the hokey pokey and turn yourself around.
That's what it's all about!

Substitute other body parts for the right arm, or have the learners shout out a body part to substitute. Don't forget the whole self!

After completing the dance, invite the learners to be seated, either on the floor or in chairs. Ask:

- How did it feel to do this dance?
- What memories did it inspire?
- How would you describe those memories?
- Why do we learn a song like this as children and yet still enjoy it as adults?
- Do you feel more or less connected to your bodies now than you did as a child? Why?

Invite the learners to be attentive to young children they may encounter this week and how children use their bodies and their energy.

8 Walking

Leader preparation: Think of the neighborhood around the church or building in which you meet. Are you surrounded by businesses, homes, fields, or a cemetery? Mindful walking is a way to get outside of the church or home in which you meet and, in an unobtrusive yet intentional way to honor God beyond the confines of human-made buildings. It can be a walking prayer, using the body's movement as a way to pray.

As you plan this activity, be aware of the varying levels of ambulatory health or ability of the learners. If there is someone in a wheelchair, who has asthma, or is physically out of shape, you will want to be sure all can participate in a positive and life-affirming manner. If there is inclement weather or severe allergies with high pollen content around your building, allow for an indoor walk or the option of an indoor walk.

Supplies: None

Invite the participants to take a deep breath, hold it for a couple of seconds, and then let it out. Allow a pause and a minute of quiet. Then invite participants to take another deep breath.

Let the learners know that you will all be taking a walk. Talk about being intentional during the walk, intentional in the pace used and in awareness of the neighborhood or the building of the church.

Invite people who wish to go for a brisk, fast paced walk to move to one side of the room and those who wish to have more of an amble to move to the other side of the room. Invite these two groups to divide up into two or three people.

Give instructions for the learners to be aware of their surroundings, to walk in quietness, and to make observations about their neighborhood rather than having conversations with one another. Invite them in the quietness of their hearts to offer a prayer for their surroundings; whether a prayer for the farmers and their families and the creatures of their earth or for the families of those who are buried in the cemetery or for the employment of people who work in the buildings or for the families, seniors, or ethnic groups who live in your neighborhood. Set a time limit for gathering back in your room.

When everyone is back, ask participants if there is anything they wish to share about their walk—from personal reflection to something they noticed of particular significance.

For the next week encourage them to be intentional in their awareness of the neighborhoods they go through and to offer prayers in the quietness of their hearts.

9 Tasting

Leader preparation: Bring together different tastes for learners to sample on their tongues. Let this be a casual activity, but still an activity for the amount of time you have. Be attentive to any food allergies or sensitivities among your learners.

Use different liquids for learners to have a different sensation on their tongues, such as balsamic vinegar, grape juice, Worcestershire or soy sauce, cold coffee, and Coke or Pepsi. To be hygienic, provide bits of lettuce or celery sticks or apples slices to dip into each liquid.

Consider serving snacks after this exploration. If you choose this, be sure to set those snack foods separately from the tasting snacks. Again be aware of potential food allergies. You might provide sweet snacks (such as dark chocolate candies) and salty snack foods (such as tortilla chips with salsa, cheese and crackers), or fruits or vegetables with dips (such as caramel, cream cheese, marshmallow, ranch) for the health conscious.

Supplies:

- table for food items away from your circle for other activities
- food items
- separate bowls with the names of the liquids written on the bottom
- platters for torn lettuce leaves or celery sticks or apple slices
- (optional) snack foods
- small plates and napkins for snack foods
- cold water and another beverage to drink
- glasses for the beverages

Invite the learners to name their favorite food and what memories are associated with that particular food. Identify whether each one's favorite is sweet, salty, tart, bitter, or savory. After everyone has had a chance to share, ask participants if food tastes better when they are eating with someone else or when they are eating alone.

Invite them to sample mystery liquids to see if they can identify them. Explain that all the liquids are safe for drinking and none contain alcohol. If anyone has food allergies, he or she needs to see you before the group begins tasting.

To sample, each person should take the piece of vegetable or fruit and dip it into the liquid. Only after everyone has sampled the same liquid should you ask them or should the person identify the taste sensation and the liquid. The only other instruction is that they cannot reuse the same piece of vegetable or fruit to dip. Invite everyone to sample and remind people with allergies or sensitivities to meet with you first.

When everyone who can has sampled a liquid, invite them to name the taste sensation they experienced (salt, sweet, tart, dry, bitter) and to name the liquid.

Option: After everyone is done, invite them to eat snacks and a beverage.

Reflect

Did the learners seem to connect with the theme, Honoring the Body? What activity was well received? Was there an activity about which they did not seem as enthusiastic? Why or why not? How did the learners connect with one another? Will you want to do another ice-breaking type of introduction for the next Exploration?

Attachment: Activity 3

Soda Bread

This recipe forms a rough and rustic-looking fine-grained bread.

Ingredients:

- 3½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp sugar (optional)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 10–12 oz of sour milk or buttermilk

How to Work:

- Fully preheat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly flour a round cake pan.
- In a large bowl, sift dry ingredients together. Form a well in the center of the dry ingredients. Pour in three quarters of the sour milk or buttermilk and stir. Add more milk if necessary. The dough should be soft and sticky.
- Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead a couple times. You do not want to over knead. Don't be concerned if the dough is sticky. This is not traditional yeast bread. Shape into a round ball, place the dough in the pan, flatten it a bit and cut a cross on it.
- Bake for 45 minutes. Tap the bottom of the bread to check for doneness. If it is cooked it will sound hollow.
- For a crunchy crust, leave it to cool on a rack. For a softer crust wrap it up in a clean dishtowel.

Note: The milk needs to be soured or buttermilk in order to create interaction with the baking soda so that the bread will rise. To make sour milk, add 1 tbsp vinegar to 2% or whole milk and then let it sit for 15 minutes before using.

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

The Bible may be unfamiliar to seekers and new church participants. Some of them may remember snippets of Bible stories from family or Sunday school times when they were young. One challenge for this group is to help them to become more familiar with the Bible and to connect it to everyday life. One joy will be that they may come with a more fresh approach to the stories of the Bible. As you work with seekers and new church participants in this Exploration, assure them that no question is too dumb to be asked. It may be that you will need to help them know how the Bible is organized (chapters and verses, Old and New testaments) and how to place the stories and the books of the Bible in context. In this Exploration they will have a chance to become more familiar with the stories of faith and with the Bible itself.

About this Exploration

Through careful study and prayer, we discern scripture's guidance for faithful living. From the creation of human beings in Genesis to the Gospel accounts of God Incarnate in Jesus Christ, scripture references and celebrates the human body. The body is a source of wonder in the Psalms, of delight in the Songs of Solomon, and of hope in the New Testament. We learn of God's tender embrace of humanity, made in God's very image. We discover bodies of all ages, abilities, and healthiness—multifaceted and diverse. Although scripture cannot be used as an inerrant blueprint for modern living, it presents the opportunity to continually evaluate and reimagine the miraculous and amazing vessel that God not only gives but co-habits with us. Scripture is a living, breathing source continually growing and changing as it empowers persons in all ages and of all ages.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 2:1–25
Romans 12:1–8

Leader Preparation

If possible, set up the room with a small worship center on a table, perhaps with a cloth, a candle, and an open Bible as a focal area for this Exploration. Arrange the chairs in the round to promote discussion. At the beginning of this Exploration, you may wish to have the participants introduce themselves to one another by stating their names and perhaps answering a question about the Bible, such as: What character do you know from the Bible? or What event do you remember from the Bible?

Welcome the learners when they come into the room. If there a new participant arrives, introduce him or her to someone who was present last week in order to encourage mingling and conversation. Then go back to the door to continue to greet and welcome.

Let this be a time of curiosity and inquisitiveness about the Bible and its stories. Create space so that there is no embarrassment if they fumble to find books or chapters or verses in the Bible.

Prayer: Guide me, O God, in the ways of your heart, your realm of peace and justice. Help me to keep an open ear, an open eye, and an open heart to catch those unexpected glimpses of you in the Bible and in the interactions that will happen among these learners as they seek to connect honoring the body with stories of faith from the scriptures. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Our Bodies (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on images of the body that are prevalent on television and in magazines. Then read Romans 12:1–8, paying particular attention to verses 1–2.

Set up the newsprint centrally so all can see it, or arrange seating in relationship to the whiteboard.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the learners to describe images of the human body they see when watching television or looking through magazines. Sample questions to ask:

- Who are some of the popular models, actors, or actresses that we see on television or in magazines?
- What body-image characteristics do they share?
- What are the differences in body image?

Read Romans 12:1–8 together. Focus attention on the part of verse 1 that reads “to present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.” Ask: *What are the major issues, or what is the meaning of this phrase?*

Focus first on the word “sacrifice,” writing it on the newsprint or whiteboard. Ask the learners to lift up examples of sacrifice. Steer them toward examples of offering sacrifice for another person(s), such as how a parent sacrifices for a child to have food or a good education, how military personnel who are deployed overseas sacrifice time spent with spouses and children in order to serve their nation, and how a person sacrifices by donating a kidney for someone on dialysis with diseased kidneys.

Then focus on the word “holy,” writing it on the newsprint. Invite the learners to define their understanding of this word. Being seekers and new church participants, they may have a limited definition of this word, using words such as “purity,” “righteous,” “doctrinal,” and “rigid.” Let these words be expressed but, if you need to, push them to include words like “compassion,” “justice,” “mercy,” and “love.”

Discuss with learners what lifestyle changes they would do to “present their body as a living sacrifice.” Some sample questions to ask could be these.

- Would you make changes in the types of food you eat?
- Would you make changes in the number of hours you work?
- Would you advocate for any policy changes at work?
- Would you make any changes in your sleeping habits?

Again reflect on models, actors, and actresses. *If we use them as an image to aspire to, how does their influence encourage us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice?*

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help participants engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

2 God’s Tender Embrace

Leader preparation: Listen to “I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry.” Be especially attentive to the words. Think of the baptisms, marriages and deaths that you have attended. Are you able to trace the presence of God within those times?

Read Psalm 139:13–16 to be familiar with it. If anyone in the group is hearing impaired, print the lyrics in a large letters one newsprint, or make a photocopy in at least 14 point type.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymn: “I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>

Distribute the Bibles and invite the learners to turn to Psalm 139. If you are using Bibles that are all the same, you can give them the page number. If the Bibles are different and there is need, assist them in finding this psalm. Tell the participants that the Hebrew word for “Psalms” means “musical praise.” The songs and poetry of the Book of Psalms were used during worship.

Let the learners know that we’ll be reading only a portion of this psalm, and invite two learners to read aloud, giving one learner verses 1–6 and the other learner verses 13–16. After the reading, ask if anyone has comments or questions. Do they find this passage comforting? Or do they feel “creeped out” when the psalmist says that God has always been there, even when they were “being made in secret” in their mother’s womb?

Listen to the song “I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry.” Allow a pause for reflection after the song is done. Then invite discussion. *What part of the life journey, as sung in this song, did you find most compelling? In what way do we honor the body at birth? During a wedding ceremony? When someone dies?*

3 Multifaceted

Leader preparation: Think of the ways you care for and honor your own body. How is this care shaped by the advertisements on television and in magazines? How is the care of your body shaped by other people’s genuine concern for your wholeness and health?

Place magazines on tables, creating enough space for all of the learners to be able to gather around a table, cut out and create two collages. Use recycled magazines purchased in a typical grocery store or chain store. Have bare space on walls or bulletin boards for displaying the two collages. Set up the space to show the video.

Supplies:

- Bible
- magazines, scissors, glue sticks
- newsprint
- music video: “Imago Dei” by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Ask learners to reflect quietly on these questions.

- What is the ideal body image of a female?
- What is the ideal body image of a male?

Invite them to think about age, shape, weight, skin color, adornment, and faces. Then have the learners count off in twos to form two groups, one to create a collage of male images and words and the other to create a collage of female images and words. Have them cut out magazine pictures and words to glue on a piece of newsprint that speaks to this ideal body image that our culture promotes through the media. Have them display each collage and look at the two sets of images. Invite comments about what draws their attention in the two collages.

- What is the ideal age? Skin color? Weight?
- What are the differences between the male and female collages?
- What words fit the ideal male? The ideal female?
- Where do disabilities, illness, or death fit in?

Then read the following paragraph.

Honoring the body means choosing a life of wholeness, holiness, and joy. In a time when the body is idealized or objectified—often, disrespected—people of faith claim its God-made nature and its potential to express itself as spiritual treasure. Although created in the image of God, every culture and generation expresses different understandings of adornment and beauty.

Read aloud Romans 12:4–5, and then show the video for “Imago Dei.” Invite discussions about the differences between the collages they made and the people presented in “Imago Dei.”

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 **Breath (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Take a deep breath and be conscious of your breathing. Think about how you nurture your spirituality in ways that are connected with your body. Do you go for walks and talk with God? Do you sometimes just sit and relax on your porch or patio or in a park, breathing deeply? Do you practice yoga or meditation in your car, at home or in a class, conscious of body poses at the same time aware of God’s presence? Awareness of our bodies seems to simultaneously bring about awareness of God’s presence in our lives.

Have lots of space for the learners to spread out to relax their bodies.

Supplies:

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the learners to think about their spirituality in connection with their bodies. What particular practices or routines might remind them of how their bodies are connected to their spirituality? Pose the questions in the Leader preparation. Perhaps you can share your own answers as well.

Invite the learners to get comfortable. They can remain seated in their chairs or find someplace on the floor to sit or lay down.

Invite them to close their eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Tell them to inhale and hold the breath and then to exhale and pause. Breathe with them. Repeat a few times, suggesting that this is a time of silence as you all remain aware of your breathing.

After two to three minutes of breathing, invite them—with eyes still closed—to wiggle body parts, one at a time. Wiggle their fingers then their toes, wiggle their eyebrows, wiggle their ears. Allow laughter and humor. Suggest the possibility that some may have more difficulty than others wiggling eyebrows or ears. Invite comments from learners who are able to do this. Perhaps they can show others how they can do it.

End this part of the activity by inviting them to take a couple of more deep breaths. *Take a deep breath, hold, and then let go. Take one last deep breath, hold, and then let go.* Invite them to open their eyes, if they haven't already done so, and to sit up.

Ask them to think about the week ahead and ways they might honor their bodies by strengthening the connection between their bodies and their spirituality. What activity do they wish to start doing? What one activity do they wish to continue doing? Write their suggestions on the newsprint or whiteboard.

5 Puttering

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 2:4b–25. Imagine this scene of God creating the world with hands of love.

If the weather and your meeting location permit, you may wish to do this activity outdoors. You will need tables large enough for learners to have room to gather around to plant the seeds. Have tables and planting supplies ready to go. If there are any differently abled people in your group (ambulatory difficulties or hearing or vision impaired), make provisions that all may feel welcomed and included in this activity and able to participate in it.

Have enough supplies on each table for learners to be able to plant seeds to take home. Leave the bowls empty as you will fill them with water from the pitchers during the reading. Have the bags opened so that the dirt/potting soil is readily available.

Supplies:

- potting soil or dirt, trowels or spoons, pots and seeds
- pitchers of water, bowls
- vinyl tablecloths, canvas or newspaper to lay on tables, possibly under tables if indoors
- Bible
- old, clean towels for cleaning up hands

Invite the learners to gather around the tables with the potting soil, pots, trowels, spoons, seeds, and bowls. Each table should have a water pitcher in the center. Let them know that they will be planting seeds with their hands, and invite them to take off rings, bracelets, and watches.

While they plant, you will read to them from the Bible, but first they should sit, close their eyes, and listen. Begin by reading the following.

Imagine that the world—the earth—has not yet been created. God, the great Gardener, is thinking, wondering, pondering, looking out upon the nothingness. Out of God's passion and essence, a dream came forth, a vision beckoned.

Then read Genesis 2:4b–6. During verses 5–6, pour some of the water from the pitchers into the bowls. Allow the noise of the splashing water to be heard after you read the words “rain,” “stream,” “water.”

Read Genesis 2:7. Pause, and then invite them to open their eyes and use their hands to place soil in their pots and plant seeds and adding water to their potted seeds. Continue reading the creation story, verses 8–10 and verses 18–25.

Then briefly pause reading, and invite the learners to stop their activity momentarily. Offer this brief prayer or one of your own: *May this story remain in our hearts and speak to us, O God, of your loving care of all that you have formed and created in our world. Amen.*

As the learners finish planting the seeds, show them where the extra water and clean towels are.

Use the following as sample questions to draw out comments as they finish planting.

- How does the soil feel on your hand? Do you like having your bare hand in the dirt?
- What memories were elicited of other times when you've put your hand in soil?
- What images of God came to mind as I read this story to you?
- What does this story tell us about the character of God?
- What thoughts are evoked when you think of the creation of seeds being made, that could grow and multiply themselves through future seeds, without any further help from God except through sunlight and rain?

6 God's Presence

Leader preparation: Think about the baptisms you have attended. Think about your church's baptisms. Does your church baptize babies or youth and adults? You may wish to talk with your pastor about the specific meaning of baptism in your church.

If possible, this activity should take place in the sanctuary by the baptismal pool or font. If it feels comfortable, pour water into the baptism font for blessing each person. If not, use a bowl on a small table at the front of the sanctuary—or at the rear, if your baptismal area is near that. Alternatively, you could do this in any room with a little table set up with a pitcher of water, a bowl, and some small towels. Have space around the bowl of water so that several people can reach the water to bless one another at the same time.

Have hymnbooks or printouts of the song so that you can sing this song. If you're not musically inclined, enlist a volunteer from church or from the group who can either lead you in singing the song a cappella or play the piano.

Supplies:

- Bible
- baptism font or pitcher of water and a bowl
- small towels for drying
- hymn: “I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtQI50ic>

Invite the learners into the sanctuary. Gather at the pool or around the font or the table with the bowl and pitcher of water. Invite the learners to describe any baptism they remember, either theirs or someone else’s. Describe your church’s baptismal ritual.

Read Mark 1:9–13. Ask the participants to voice their thoughts about Jesus’ baptism and the Spirit driving him into the wilderness. Invite the participants to reflect upon wilderness experiences in their own lives and how those experiences have helped to shape their spirituality. Ask if anyone wishes to comment out loud.

Invite the learners to find a partner and to mark one another with water. (If there are an odd number of learners, you become a partner also.)

Dip one finger from each hand in the water and mark your partner’s face with the shape of a heart. Start with the fingertips of both hands on the bridge of the nose, go up around both eyebrows, along your partner’s cheekbones and end at the chin. As you make this mark, say to your partner, “Blessed are you, child of God.”

Ask if there are any questions about what you are all going to do. Have them pair up. After everyone has a partner, pour water from the pitcher into the font or the bowl. Offer a phrase of thanksgiving such as: *We give you thanks, O God, for this gift of water—water to nourish the cells of our bodies, water to cleanse our faces and our feet from the grit of the day, water to heal and soothe our spirits. Amen.*

Invite them forward in pairs, a couple at a time, to mark each other’s faces, handing each pair a small towel to dry their fingers after they are finished.

When everyone is done, distribute the words and sing “I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry.”

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Sexuality (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about your attitude toward sexuality and gender. Think about your comfort or discomfort in initiating this conversation. Sexuality can be a volatile issue, but in this activity we’re just looking at the basics of sexuality by using particular Bible verses.

If any express a desire for a more in depth discussion about sexuality, invite them to meet together at another time. There is also the option at the end of this activity for using *Our Whole Lives (OWL)* curriculum to create another group. How soon it gets going depends on whether you have any trained facilitators at your church or a church nearby. You might provide a signup sheet for those who are interested. Ask for name, telephone number, and e-mail address. Also, include this

website address on the signup sheet: www.ucc.org/justice/sexuality-education/our-whole-lives.html.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read the following paragraph or, if you are comfortable, make a statement in your own words about acknowledging the awkwardness that can come with discussing sex and sexuality within a group and about your desire to make this a safe space in which questions and curiosity are welcomed without judgment.

Sexuality is not an easy topic to discuss because we come with all sorts of attitudes, biases, and opinions about sex and sexuality. Some of us may have been wounded and hurt in this area of our life. Some of us may have a hunger to talk about sex and sexuality but do not know how to begin. In order for this to be a safe space, everyone needs to be respectful of each person's comments and questions. And this is a space where no one has to participate by talking if there is a desire not to and where all may participate simply by listening.

Then ask the following questions.

- When you think about your childhood, how open was your family in discussing sex?
- What did you learn about sex from conversations with your family?
- Where else did you learn about sex?

The first Bible verse is about the first man and woman created in the Garden of Eden. It happened after they were kicked out of Eden. Read Genesis 4:1. Point out that the phrase “knew his wife” means that they had sexual relations.

The second Bible verse is about a widowed woman, Naomi, and her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, who in their impoverishment find some support through Boaz, a male relative. Read Ruth 3:1–11. Point out that in the Hebrew scriptures “feet” is sometimes used as a euphemism for “genitals.”

Ask the learners if their families—either one's family of origin or one's current family—are able to talk about genitals or sexuality using correct names or if they use certain common words or euphemisms that indicate genitals or sex. Ask:

- Why does it seem so difficult for anyone to talk of these matters?
- Why are euphemisms so prevalent in our conversations about sex?
- How should we talk about sex and sexuality?

Introduce the United Church of Christ curriculum called *Our Whole Lives (OWL)*. Explain that the OWL curriculum promotes sex education as a way to make healthy decisions about our sexuality for all ages, children through adult. It teaches that each of us is responsible for our own sexuality. It covers heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender sexual health. Invite anyone interested in being part of a group or facilitating a group to please sign up on the sheet provided. Then pass around the signup sheet for those who may be interested in participating in further discussions.

8 Adaptability

Leader preparation: Think about people who live with handicaps or chronic illnesses. Do you cope with either of these? There are many handicaps or illnesses that require adaptations to function independently in our world today: insulin shots for diabetes, medication for multiple sclerosis, Crohn's Disease, bipolar disorder, and all of the physical adaptations we use to adapt or be "normal": contacts lenses, hearing aids, dentures, wheelchairs, prosthesis, and so forth.

Display the artwork "Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope" for all to see. Read through Mark 2:1-12 to be familiar with the story.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- maker and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: "Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope," <http://www.art.com/products/p13951106-sa-i2746744/man-in-a-wheelchair-on-a-tightrope.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0>

Invite learners to think about the number of people who, due to a disability or a chronic illness, need to adapt in order to live independently. Some of us use equipment or medication to maintain our health or independence. Some of us have visible disabilities or are obviously dealing with a chronic illness while others of us have invisible illnesses or handicaps. If there are persons in the group who are living with disability or chronic illness, invite them to share as "experts."

Ask learners to name different types of chronic illnesses or physical disabilities that people cope with and write them on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Distribute Bibles, and have participants find Mark 2:1-12. (If necessary, help them find the passage, either by giving them the page number if all Bibles are the same or by helping them to find the table of contents.) Ask for volunteers to read the story aloud while everyone else listens. Then have learners summarize the story in their own words. Ask for comments.

- What is your first response to this story?
- What do you think about Jesus healing the paralytic?
- Why, do you suppose, some people are healed and others are not?

Allow time for discussion. Then draw their attention to the image "Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope." Ask:

- Where is the miracle for a person confined to a wheelchair?
- What other adaptations would this person in a wheelchair need to make in order to live independently?
- In what ways is the church welcoming for persons with disabilities?

Then return to the scripture story about the paralytic man who was healed. *What adaptations will he and others around him need to make now that he is no longer paralyzed?*

9 Co-habitability

Leader preparation: Watch the YouTube feature “Imago Dei,” paying particular attention to the pictures presented during the third verse when the women sing about the images of Christ.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- music video: “Imago Dei” by Jill Kirsten Warner, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2duLAakNyuw>

Play the song “Imago Dei” for the learners to listen to and absorb the tune. Show it twice. During the second time, draw their attention to the images of Christ in the third verse.

The phrase *imago dei* is Latin for “image of God.” Point out that in our very first book of the Bible, Genesis, in the creation story in chapter 1, we are affirmed as being made in the image of God.

Pass out Bibles and ask a volunteer to read Genesis 1:27. Ask: *What is an image?* Discuss what it means for people to be created in God’s image. *What qualities do we exhibit that show that we are made in the image of God?*

Then ask a volunteer to read Luke 1:30–35. Ask another volunteer to read John 1:14. Invite comments about these two readings. *Are these familiar stories? How do these stories invite us to think about being made in the image of God?*

Invite the learners to share thoughts about how being made in the image of God affects our understanding of what it means to honor the body. Ask:

- As you think about your lifestyle, how do you feel you honor your body as created in the image of God?
- How do you determine what honors and what dishonors a body that is made in the image of God?
- How does this idea of all people being made in the image of God affect how we treat one another?
- If all people are made in the image of God, and people are so very different, what does this say about God?

Play the song again, inviting the learners to sing along.

Reflect

Which activities seemed the most productive of discussion or insights? In what ways does it seem as though the learners are connecting honoring the body to spirituality? Were you able to feel a sense of the diversity of bodies that are God made and blessed just as they are?

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Discipleship is a practice. Often when we think of discipleship and following Jesus, it feels heavy, serious, and quite detached from the body. Yet, as disciples of Jesus, we believe that God came to us in the flesh. Through this Exploration seekers and new church participants can bring together the goodness from our culture and what it means to be a post-modern disciple who honors the body as a gift from God. There may be many questions about Jesus; there may be a thirst for knowledge about a Jesus who honored different bodies that were not always honored in his own culture. Stir up their appetite to learn more about this radical Jesus who came to demonstrate God's love and grace.

About this Exploration

When Jesus said to the first disciples, "Come, follow me," he was speaking not only to their hearts and minds, but also to a reorientation of their entire bodies. He expected a physical movement from one place to another and a commitment of their whole person to a new way of living. All Christian disciples are incarnations of God's love and compassion. For modern day disciples, following Jesus remains an embodied task—one rooted firmly in practice and lifestyle as well as belief. As disciples we are still invited to follow Jesus with our whole selves, engaged body and soul, by God's grace and love. As we care for and with our bodies, in the daily practices of eating, movement, resting, and relating to other God-created beings, we offer new and profound models of Christian discipleship as an embodied practice for others to embrace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalms 71
Mark 5:21-43

Leader Preparation

Greet the learners as they arrive. If there is anyone who has not been present before, make introductions to help that person feel more welcome.

Set up the meeting space so there is lots of open space, because several activities in this Exploration involve movement. You may wish to display a cross prominently somewhere in the room. Consider the use of a “fair trade cross” (such as the painted Guatemalan cross or an olive wood cross made by the Palestinians) that will serve as a reminder of how interconnected we are with the larger world. Hang this, perhaps, next to the two pieces of artwork that are used within this Exploration, even if you do not use the activities with that artwork.

Prayer: Bless me as a leader, O God, in the search for ways to open ears, eyes, and hearts to your saving grace that lives on through the ways we honor our bodies. Help us to move ever closer to you. Help us to the joy and delight of knowing that we are in relationship with you through Jesus who is our Christ. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help participants engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serv-

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Reorientation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on your discipleship as a follower of Jesus. Do you make your decisions differently because you are his disciple? How does following Jesus affect your food choices and your attitude toward your own body?

Read Psalm 71 so that you will be comfortable reading it slowly and clearly for the learners.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper, pens

Write the word “disciple” on the newsprint or whiteboard, and invite the learners to define what it means. Then write the word “reorientation” and ask what it means in general and in terms of being a disciple.

Distribute papers and pens. Before reading Psalm 71, ask learners to be attentive to any phrases or words that stand out to them and to write those phrases or words on their paper as you read. Then read the psalm, taking your time, allowing a pause at the end of the reading.

Invite the learners to divide into groups of three to four people to read the phrases or words that they have written. Ask each person to tell why he or she thought that phrase or word had attracted him or her. Give several minutes for this.

Then have the small group give their attention back to the bigger group. Ask the people in the small groups about their exchanges. Did any of the other people in their small group focus on the same phrase or word? Did each person have a different phrase or word? If anyone else in their small group wrote the same word or phrase, did the other person give the same reason for being attracted to it?

Have the participants focus on the word “reorientation” and what it might mean in light of this psalm. Sample questions could be:

- In what way does this psalm show the author reorienting his life?
- If you are a disciple of Jesus, how does that change your values or the lifestyle patterns you may have?



2 Bare Bones

Leader preparation: Create space for the learners to move around. The intent for the movements is not to see who is the most flexible but to demonstrate how valuable the backbone is to us.

Display the artwork centrally so all the learners will be able to see it.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Back Bone, c. 1997” by Tony Cragg, <http://www.art.com/products/p12210191-sa-i1581812/tony-cragg-back-bone-c1997.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=back+bone+cragg>

ing.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

Draw attention to the artwork. Without telling the participants the title, ask what they see. Ask: *What title would you give it? What does this picture represent? Unless someone gets it right, give them the title and ask if they think it fits. Then ask: Why the backbone is important for the whole body? With what other bones does it connect to in the body?*

Invite the learners to stand to do movements, giving them the option to do this activity sitting down. Allow space for movement. Let the learners know that you will give simple directions. They are to be aware of how they use their back. Caution them not to push their movements too hard. If there are persons with back injuries, they are to adapt and use minimal movements if they wish to participate in doing these moves.

First, have them stretch their backs, reaching toward the ceiling, using their arms to assist them to reach. Then have them bend forward from the hip and then straighten. They should bend only as far as they are comfortable—this is not an exercise class. Ask them to bend sideways to the left, with their right arm over their head, stretching that side of the back first, and then switch to stretch to the left side. Again, they are to adapt the moves so that they don’t overdo. Have them twist to the right, with their fists on their hips, and then twist to the left, twisting only as far as is comfortable.

Then ask them to bend forward again, but this time tell them to let their arms dangle from their shoulders. Ask them to straighten up one vertebrae at a time, as they are able.

Invite everyone to be seated.

Now, ask them how we are to care for the backbones. *What are some safety tools, equipment, or movements we use to minimize the potential for back injuries?* (Using backpacks that fit properly with shoulder and waist straps, bending at the knees rather than from the waist to lift a box, wearing a corset/girdle, asking another person to help you carry a heavy or awkward object, using a forklift to move a heavy object).

Then direct the discussion to discipleship matters. *What does it mean to be the “backbone” of an organization or a church?* Some examples would include persons who are connected to many parts as the backbone is connected to the legs, arms and head; a person who is able to yield or adapt to assist others as the backbone bends, twists, and stretches to help the arms reach and to provide balance for the legs; a person who learns to delegate when there is something too difficult to move. Ask:

- How does “backbone” help us explore the practice of discipleship?
- For a disciple of Jesus, what might the backbone be composed of?

3 Flashmob

Leader preparation: Watch the video (about 4 minutes), and set up the space so that everyone can see it. Mute the sound so that the learners will only be able to watch it the first time. On the second time, show it with the sound on so that they will watch and listen.

Supplies:

- Internet connection and data projector
- video: “Sound of Music Central Station Antwerp (Belgium),” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EYAUazLI9k>

Introduce the learners to the Flashmob video feature by telling them that anyone who has already seen it should not share what it is about, letting it be a surprise for first-time watchers. Also, let them know that they’ll be watching it with the sound muted the first time to see if they can make sense of it. Then show the video.

After participants watch it without sound, ask them what they saw.

- Did it make sense without the sound?
- Can you guess what was going on?
- How does this experience help you understand the life of people with disabilities or chronic illness?
- Who do you know who has a physical or mental disability or a chronic illness?
- How do they cope with it?
- In what ways does it affect their energy level?
- In what ways does it put restraints around some of the activities they would like to do?

After the discussion, turn on the sound and watch the video a second time.

- What unified the group?
- What feelings did you see expressed as the dancers moved their bodies?
- What feelings did you see expressed by the people who stood to watch?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Entering the Story (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the two intertwined stories in Mark. Create space for people to act out the stories.

Supplies:

- Bible

Distribute the Bibles and ask participants to turn to Mark 5:21–43. If everyone has the same Bible, give them the page number. If the Bibles are different, have them use the table of contents under New Testament, if they need help finding it. Give everyone time to get to the page, helping them as needed. Invite the learners to read the story aloud, starting with the person to your right. Allow them to pass if they don’t wish to read aloud.

After the story, ask everyone to close their Bibles. (You may wish to keep your Bible opened to accurately remember how the story goes.)

Invite four different volunteers to be: Jesus, Jairus, the hemorrhaging woman, and the daughter of Jairus. They are to act out the story as they remember it being

read. Divide the rest of the group in half, letting them stay seated where they are. Assign one half to be the disciples of Jesus and the other half to be the mourners.

Before beginning the drama, let the seated learners know that if it seems one of the actors is getting his or her lines or action wrong, a learner is to clap and let the actor know which part is wrong. If other learners agree, then the clapping learner takes the actor's place.

Let the acting begin. Whenever anyone claps, stop the acting; ask the clapper to describe what should have happened, and, if others agree, the clapper then replaces the actor.

When the drama has been acted to the end, have a round of applause for everyone. Then ask: *How do these two stories tell us to honor the body as disciples of Jesus?*

5 Rabble Rouser

Leader preparation: Screen off a part of the room so that it can't be seen from the doorway. Hang up a cloth, put up temporary wall panels, or clear a space behind a door. You will introduce the learners to John 2:13–18 through the noise you will be creating. Read this passage to be familiar with the order in which the noises will occur.

Place a table behind the screened off place and put the container of coins and the damp towel on the table. Have the noises of the animals ready to go.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- table
- many coins in a container from which they can pour out quickly and easily
- tray to catch the coins
- several cords that you can twist together, or a kitchen towel that is damp and twisted up so you can whip or snap it
- crashing sound as of a table tipping over
- recordings, YouTube videos, or your own voice for the sounds of people, doves, sheep, and cattle being pushed

Tell the learners that you are going to make some noises as a way of telling a story. Invite them to listen and try to guess what is going on. Then go behind the screened off area and create the noises in the order in which you find them in John 2:13–18 (noises of cattle, sheep and people, whipping noise, pouring out the coins, table and coins tipping over, sound of doves, Jesus' voice).

After you are done, join the learners again and ask what they thought the story from the noises might be about. Ask them what their feelings were as they were able to hear but not see what was happening.

Then distribute the Bibles and ask them to find John 2:13–18. Invite some learners to read the story. After the story, invite comments. Ask: *What did you think of Jesus' behavior? Does this story of Jesus differ from the image of Jesus you have in your head? In what way?*

Then invite the learners to dramatize the story. You will need four people for the following roles: narrator, Jesus ("Jesus" does have one line to memorize in verse 16), a person doing the whip, and a person pouring out the coins and tipping over

the table. Then various people can make the sounds of the sheep, the cattle and people being driven out, and the doves.

Let the narrator read the first and last verses (13 and 17) with no noise in the background. When everyone is ready and in place, begin the drama.

After the drama, ask:

- In what ways does this story make you look at discipleship differently?
- What surprised you?
- What questions does this event create?
- Can you see yourself as a rabble rouser disciple?

⑥ Little Clues

Leader preparation: Faith is a serious matter, but there are also moments of light-heartedness. Reflect on the times you have found joy and humor in your faith life. Review the four passages listed below to share with the learners.

When the learners are doing the re-enactment, if you are in the Midwest or a northern region of North America, you may need to tell the learners to shrink the space between themselves and the other people who are part of the crowd. Jesus and his disciples were an Eastern people and didn't have the same need for large private space around them as we do in the twenty-first century North America.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- box of props for Matthew 14:22–31 (box to represent a boat, various blue fabrics for sea and waves)
- box of props for John 6:5–13 (12 baskets, cut out drawings of 5 pieces of bread and 2 fishes)

Distribute Bibles. Invite the learners to find Mark 5:24b. Explain that the “b” refers to the second sentence of that verse. Then ask for some to volunteer to read it aloud from verse 24b to verse 34.

Direct the learners to focus on verses 30–31. Ask them to re-enact this scene. Ask for a volunteer to be narrator, one to be Jesus, and several to be the disciples. The rest of the learners can be the crowd. Have the narrator direct the scene. Remind learners to “press in on” Jesus. When they have finished the re-enactment, ask for comments. Did anything strike them as funny? If not, ask them to look again at Jesus' question. Is there humor there?

Then invite the learners to divide into two groups. Each group will receive a Bible passage of a story about Jesus. They are to look for the humor in the story as they consider how to dramatize it for the other group. Give them five minutes to pull together a drama before performing.

Give one group Matthew 14:22–31, and give the other group John 6:5–13. If a group is unable to find humor in their story, point out for the Matthew passage how the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost and how Peter needed only to look down at the waves to find himself sinking. For the John passage, point out Philip's over-exaggeration of needing six months' wages to feed the crowd and how all it took was a little boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes for Jesus to create a miraculous feeding. *How do laughter and humor honor the body? How does laughter and humor help us as disciples?*

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Life and Death (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on healing, illness, and death. How do we define healing? Is it the absence of death? Are healing and cure the same thing?

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bible

Read aloud Mark 5:21–43. Ask the learners to point out the particularities—the details—of this story, such as the two women being healed, an older woman who tries secretly to seek healing from her constant bleeding, and a synagogue leader seeking healing from Jesus for his dying daughter who is on the brink of womanhood.

Invite the learners to think about illness and healing they have experienced in their own lives or seen in the lives of someone else. Have them tell their stories in groups of three or four. Allow several minutes, and have those who are willing tell their stories to the whole group.

On the newsprint or whiteboard, write “healing.” Invite the learners to define what healing means in the context of the stories they have just shared and in the context of the stories from the Bible. Pose these or similar questions.

- Does honoring the body mean that the same way of healing applies to all bodies?
- Do you regard death as the opposite of healing?
- In what ways can death be understood as healing?
- In the face of death, what difference does it make to be a disciple of Jesus?

8 Be Salted

Leader preparation: Make, or ask someone else to make, two pots of soup. One small pot should have no seasoning or salt. The other pot can be made with salt. (There is probably no unsalted, unseasoned soup that you will be able to purchase ready made.)

You may wish to avoid meat, dairy, and flour products in the soup because you don’t know if you have learners who will be vegetarian, lactose intolerant, or gluten intolerant. It could be a simple vegetable soup with carrots, celery, onions and other vegetables, or you might choose a bean soup. If you would like to use the option of this becoming a time of fellowship after you are done with this Exploration, make more of the seasoned soup or perhaps bring another kind of soup to have more choices for everyone to share in a light meal.

You will want space in a kitchen or someplace near the kitchen for the learners to taste the broth when it is warm.

Write these questions on newsprint or a whiteboard:

- What did Jesus mean when he said everyone will be salted with fire?
- What might Jesus have meant when he said to have salt within ourselves?
- How would that help us to be at peace with one another?

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bible
- unsalted soup and salted soup—enough for each learner to have samples of each
- either a stove top, crock pots, or hot plate for keeping both samples warm
- two ladles for serving the soup
- small cups for each learner to sample each soup
- (optional) spoons
- (optional) more soup, with bread or crackers, and so forth, and beverages if fellowship is planned after the session.

Invite the learners to divide themselves up into groups of four or five people. Introduce Mark 9:49–50 by letting them know this is one of many sayings of Jesus. Then read the passage.

In their groups ask the learners to reflect on the questions printed on the newsprint or whiteboard. Allow several minutes to work on these. Then draw them back together and ask if there is anything they'd like to share in the larger group.

Invite them to follow you into the room where you have the soup warming. Inform the learners that there are two different soups. Tell them what is in the soup, in case anyone does have an allergy to the vegetables. They are to sample the soup, thinking about the role of salt. Invite each learner to take one cup of each.

After they have all received the soups and tasted them, ask them to tell what they think about the different soups. Salt brings out the flavors of the vegetables. Then ask them to think of saltiness in terms of how it brings out the flavor of both the individuals (vegetables) and the community (the broth made from the vegetables). Invite anymore comments.

Option: Plan a time of fellowship when you invite the rest of the congregation and serve more soup.



9 Disciple-ing

Leader preparation: Place the artwork where all can see it. Read Matthew 14:15–16 so you are familiar with it.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p9388041612-sa-i5446642/norman-rockwell-golden-rule-do-unto-others-april-1-1961.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=5000032&ui=6c6a730242504593a62db31e60ee1963&ssk=norman+rockwell>

Set the context for the reading from Matthew. This story takes place right after Jesus hears about the death of John the Baptist. Then read Matthew 14:13–16. Invite the participants to share their answers to these questions.

- What does this particular story tell us about what it means to be a disciple?
- How are we to behave toward others in their need?
- What values is Jesus promoting in this particular story? (Make sure they mention hospitality.)

Invite the learners to study the artwork “Golden Rule.” Ask them to notice and comment upon the many different nationalities and the different faith traditions depicted. Then ask: *What faith traditions might be represented among the people pictured?* (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Shintoism, Confucianism, Taoism, and so forth) Each of them may be a disciple of one of those traditions. Then ask:

- What feelings does this artwork elicit in you?
- How do these feelings shape your perceptions of and your interactions with people who look different from you?
- Which of these feelings more naturally allows room for you to express hospitality?

Reflect

Does it seem like the learners understand or are beginning to understand what it means to be a disciple? Do you feel like you know what it means to be a disciple? Does it seem like the basic lifestyle or attitude of being a disciple has shifted? In other words, what differences might there be between being a disciple living toward 2050 as compared to being a disciple in the 1950s?

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

It is possible, perhaps even likely, that seekers and new church participants may not have been exposed to many affirmations for honoring the body within Christian tradition. They may be aware only of negative values placed on the body, particularly of the female body, or of valuing the body within certain constraints (sex belongs within a marriage relationship, shame if there is accidental incontinence, marriage belongs between a man and a woman). The activities in this Exploration seek to lift up positive and life-affirming practices for honoring the body.

About this Exploration

Tradition presents a mixed perspective on the body. Part of tradition upholds the body as created by God and proclaimed as “good.” Hebrew law contains regulations to keep the body safe and healthy, and Hebrew praise includes joyous movement. Jesus shared God’s presence in bodily form—touching, laughing, walking, eating, speaking, and exploring. Through Jesus we see the body as “the temple” of God’s spirit. The body is cherished during Sabbath time and engaged fully during worship through song, dance, touch, and more. The same tradition also sees the body as “evil” and opposed to the Spirit, leading individuals and groups to abuse it and attempt to limit its impact on the Spirit. Because this part of tradition does not agree with the teachings of Jesus, it is important to go beyond its influence and seek to honor, feed, celebrate, and engage the body on our spiritual journeys.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
**Song of Solomon 4:1–7,
5:10–16
Luke 7:36–50**

Leader Preparation

Create or find a hospitable place to gather, either within the church, at a coffee shop, or in someone's home. Be a facilitator to help the learners explore their curiosities and ask questions without fear. Create a safe space to explore the ideas in the activities and those that the learners may bring with them. Help these seekers and new church participants learn their way around the Bible without feeling embarrassed by their lack of familiarity with the Bible.

Prayer: Gracious God, guide me through these activities to explore the traditions of Christianity. Give me a discerning heart to hear and see what is needed so that your Word and your Presence may be felt in our world. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help participants engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from "Exploring and Engaging," at least one from "Discerning and Deciding," and at least one from "Sending and Serving." The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Sensuousness (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Song of Solomon 4:1–7, 5:10–16. When we think in terms of our practice of "Honoring the Body," this book, and specifically these verses, can take our breath away by their sensuality.

Song of Solomon, also known as Song of Songs, is a collection of love poems. It has frequently been explained in allegorical terms. For some Jews, it represents the relationship between God and Israel; for some Christians, it represents the relationship between Christ and the church. Today we will look at it as love poetry, celebrating the sexual love between two persons.

As the readings may feel very sexual or sensual, there may be some giggling or, just the opposite, silence so loud you could hear a pin drop. Learners may be encountering these verses for the first time. Allow the awkwardness, the giggling, the silence. It's all part of honoring the body in an area in which we have been very poor at communicating or valuing so it may feel awkward and embarrassing.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask if any learners are familiar with the book of the Bible called the Song of Solomon. If there are people who raise their hands, ask them what they remember about this book. Then read aloud the information from the Leader preparation above.

Pass out the Bibles and invite the learners to turn to Song of Solomon. (If necessary, let them know that it comes shortly after the Psalms, although there are two other books in between, or direct them to their table of contents). When everyone has found it and perhaps has had time to absorb reading bits of it, ask them all turn to 4:1–7. Invite the men to read aloud these verses together. When they have finished, ask the men if any of them wish to share how it felt to read these verses intended for a church setting. (If anyone wonders about the "tower of David" let them be aware that women in the ancient near East would have worn necklaces with many rows of beads). Ask the women how it felt to be hearing these verses read to them from fellow learners in a setting hosted by church.

Then have the women read 7:10–16. Again, ask the women how it felt to read these verses. Ask the men how it felt to be hearing these verses read to them.

Ask the learners if including this book in the Bible upsets any preconceived notions they have of how faithful people ought to honor the body. Does this make them uncomfortable, or do they find it rather refreshing?

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

2 Yearning

Leader preparation: Listen to the words from the song based upon Psalm 139, “O God, You Search Me.” Set up a table with the art supplies and have a comfortable space for participants to spread out in, either seated at tables or on the floor. Weather permitting, this could be a great outdoor activity.

Supplies:

- Bible
- watercolor, gouache, or tempera paints
- magazines from which to cut pictures or words
- various colors of paper and pens for writing
- paper on which to paint or glue pictures and words
- glue, scissors, paintbrushes, little containers for water, rags
- liners to protect tables or floors from paint.
- song: “O God, You Search Me” by Bernadette Farrell, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37IN_Y3OPaM&feature=related

Invite the learners to listen as you read aloud Psalm 139:1–15. Read expressively and clearly so all can hear. Ask if there are any comments or questions. You might ask: *How does this psalm ask us to regard our body? In what way does this psalm expect us to honor our bodies?*

Then invite them to listen to the adaptation of this psalm in the song “O God, You Search Me.” After playing the music video, pause for a moment of silence. Then invite comments and questions about the song or the psalm.

Invite the learners to think about how each of us is “fearfully and wonderfully made” and to create a work of art that expresses that idea. They can either write about this psalm, their feelings about God, and about their bodies, or they can paint or cut pictures from magazines to express their images suggested by this psalm and the song.

3 Austerity

Leader preparation: This activity looks at the body from a perspective that is almost opposite from the sensuousness in Activity 1. There has been a historical practice of austerity or asceticism within the Christian tradition. Often, this tradition has been used to devalue the body. When looked at from a positive point of view, austerity or asceticism was originally intended to help a person focus more closely on strengthening a relationship with God.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bibles
- Internet access

Write these words on newsprint or a whiteboard: asceticism, austerity, dualism. Invite the learners to define these words as they apply to lifestyle and our bodies. These sample definitions may provide guidance:

- *Asceticism:* The practice of self-denial or abstinence of certain body pleasures as a religious discipline
- *Austerity:* The practice of living in simplicity with minimal belongings and denial of certain body indulgences
- *Dualism:* Dividing the body and the spirit into two parts, valuing one or the other more

When the participants have defined the words, ask the learners if these words have positive or negative meanings for them. Why? Then ask the learners with phones with the right application and laptops to go online and look up practices of asceticism and austerity. What do they find? Does anything surprise them? Can they think of other examples of practices of asceticism or austerity, either present day or from the past? Do they feel these are positive or negative in honoring the body?

Distribute the Bibles and introduce the learners to the Apostle Paul. Explain that Paul was a Jewish religious leader of the group called the Pharisees during the first century. He never met Jesus in the flesh. He persecuted the followers of Jesus. After he experienced the presence of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he became a zealous follower of Jesus as the risen Christ and became a Jewish missionary who spread the faith to non-Jewish people .

Have the learners find Paul's letter to the Romans, specifically 7:14–20. Invite a volunteer or two to read. Then ask for comments from the learners. Ask questions, such as:

- How would you describe Paul's attitude toward the body?
- Does it seem as though Paul is advocating for a practice of asceticism?

Invite other volunteers to read Paul's letter from 1 Corinthians 12:14–26. Again invite comments from the learners as they think about the words on the newsprint and Paul's attitude toward the body.

- What is Paul's attitude toward the body in this letter?
- How is it similar to or different from what he wrote to the Romans?
- Is it a negative or a positive attitude?

Then ask about the modern-day use of technology.

- Does the use of technology honor the body or devalue it? Why, or why not?
- Describe a scenario in which technology can become an ascetic practice or a practice of austerity.
- Would technology be more likely to be an obstacle? Why, or why not?
- What conclusions can we draw about how we live our life?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Retrospective (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider the past, which we carry with us. How does the past burden us? What gifts do we receive from it? What things do we need to rethink? How do certain events from the past affect our ability to honor the body?

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the participants to think back to childhood, remembering an event or relationship that honored or dishonored their bodies. Invite them to turn to the person next to them and to share that memory, if they are comfortable doing so. If not, invite those who are willing to share to do so to the whole group.

Then, as the larger group, ask the learners to broaden their view of the past by thinking back to the common histories that we share, naming out loud groups, institutions, and movements that were honored or dishonored back in the 1800s or 1900s, such as gender inequality, civil rights, slavery, emancipation, genocide, gas chambers, Underground Railroad, and so forth.

Bring the focus back to the present by asking: *Are there people that are not honored today?* Write their answers on newsprint or a whiteboard. (Sample answers: persons with mental illness, alcoholics, the homeless, gays and lesbians, Hispanic and Arabian people, Muslims, and so forth.) *In what ways can we tell that they are not honored?* (Sample answers: policies that discriminate, the use of negative language or media coverage, the use of jokes to put groups of people down, not allotting government funds for their benefit, or not allowing them to purchase land/construct a building in certain areas, and so forth.)

Invite the learners to name some ways in which particular populations are more honored today than in the past. (Sample answers: Equal Opportunities Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, creation of halfway houses for persons with addictions or mental illnesses to use as a transition from hospitalization to community living, moving persons with mental disabilities out of state hospitals into local neighborhood group homes, oversight agencies to assure quality nursing home care for the elderly and vulnerable, assisted-living facilities)

Ask the learners to look again at the populations listed on the newsprint that they named as dishonored. Invite them pick one population group that they would like to learn more about so that, together, the group could find ways they might be able to help create movement toward building more respect or honor toward them.



5 Parental Love

Leader preparation: Think of your childhood. What are your pleasant memories? Did you have parents who taught you trust?

Place “Margot Embracing Her Mother” where it can be seen. Number the paper bags and fill them with suggested items that have strong smells that may evoke the scents of home or childhood, pleasant memories. Then fold the tops of the paper bags to contain the smells.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- small brown paper bags with numbers printed on them
- aromatic ingredients: cinnamon, coffee grounds, laundry detergent, vanilla extract (on a cotton ball sitting inside a jar or plastic container), fresh flowers, potting soil, pine needles
- artwork: “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1502057828?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37961&store_id=1401

Direct the learners’ attention to the artwork. Ask them to comment upon it by using these questions as starters:

- What feelings does this art evoke in you?
- How would you describe this relationship?
- Do we live in a culture that values and nurtures this type of relationship?
- Do you ever imagine that you could be a child like this sitting in God’s lap, with your arms around his or her neck? Why, or why not?

Let the learners know that you have several common scents you want them to smell and describe the feelings the smells evoke. When they receive a paper bag, they are to close their eyes and open the bag enough to catch the smell in it. Reassure anyone who is scent sensitive that there is no perfume or scented candles in the bags, but if they are uncertain they may pass the bags to the next person.

Divide into small groups and give each group a paper bag with a scented item. Instruct them to wait until all have smelled it, and then talk about what it evokes before passing it to the next group.

When all the small groups have had a chance to experience the scents in the paper bags, invite the learners back to the big group. Ask them to share any comments about what they discussed in their small group.

On newsprint or a whiteboard, have the group list qualities in the home life that help foster love and intimacy as pictured on the artwork, such as eye contact, safe touch, smiles, gentle voice, the ability to put feelings into words, enough food to eat, having food choices, safety at night while sleeping, and so forth. When the list is finished, ask how these words honor the body. What particular word or phrase would they like to work on for the week?

⑥ Looking Back

Leader preparation: Listen to the song “Take My Life and Let It Be” to be familiar with it.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and pens
- Internet access
- hymn: “Take My Life and Let it Be,” by Frances R. Havergal (tune: Hendon), <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/m/tmlalib.htm>; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXy2MmMLjGQ&feature=related>

Play the hymn “Take My Life and Let It Be.” This hymn is found in many hymnals, so check the hymnal used by your congregation. Then tell the story of the hymn.

Story of “Take My Life and Let It Be”

Frances Havergal (1836–1879) was an unusual woman. The daughter of a minister, she mastered Greek and Hebrew to read the scriptures in their original languages. Having grown up in England, she traveled in Europe and enjoyed skiing in the Swiss Alps—an unusual recreation in the nineteenth century. She was also an accomplished singer who sometimes sang with the symphony.

Havergal was a Christian all her life but at age 36 experienced what we might describe as a conversion experience. A little book entitled *All for Jesus* made her aware of the incompleteness of her own devotion, and she rededicated her life to Christ.

Soon thereafter, she spent five days with a small group of people, some of whom were not Christians and others of whom were lukewarm. She spent those five days witnessing to them and praying for them, and she was delighted to see her prayers answered. By the end of that week, all ten people had devoted themselves to Christ. That night, too excited to

sleep, Frances Havergal sat up writing this hymn “Take My Life and Let It Be.”

Her devotion to Christ took many shapes. For one, she quit singing in secular venues and devoted herself to Christian music. For another, she donated her collection of jewelry to a missionary society to raise money for mission endeavors. But those were merely minor notes in the symphony of devotion that was Frances Havergal’s life.

—Richard Niell Donovan, ©2007, posted at <http://www.lectionary.org/HymnStories/Take%20My%20Life%20and%20Let%20It%20Be.htm>

Have the group sing the hymn. What would they change to make the hymn more contemporary? How might they use this traditional hymn in a contemporary setting?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 New Trajectories (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Who are the persons in your life who have passed on traditions to you that help you nourish your body today and also help you become a person who provides a nurturing environment for others around you? Did your parents teach you to enjoy eating vegetables or the importance of brushing your teeth? Was there a chronically ill aunt or uncle that you helped care for that taught you to honor bodies that weren’t completely healthy? Was there a school teacher who taught you to honor people who were from an ethnic background different from your own? Or, were there certain characteristics or qualities that you were born with that made you honor your body or retain the ability to honor the body of someone quite different from you in spite of opposite values around you?

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite the learners to divide up into groups of four or five people, and ask groups to discuss who it was that taught each group member the value of honoring the body. Make sure everyone has time to talk. You may wish to share some of the questions from the leader preparation to help them get started. Give several minutes for conversation.

Give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker and ask participants to turn from thinking about the past to project into the future. What patterns and behaviors do they think are important to pass onto the next generations that will help future generations to honor their bodies? It could be a political policy, medical or educational directives, or something that the church could do. Give them several minutes to brainstorm.

After the brainstorming, draw them back together, and invite the different groups to take turns presenting the ideas they recorded.

8 Healing Touch

Leader preparation: Reflect on the phrase “the touch that heals.” Think about how you use touch to convey affirmation, warmth, affection and love. Read Luke 7:36–50. Use olive oil for this activity, and allow participants the option not to participate.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- oil
- pitcher of water
- a bowl and a towel for each pair of learners
- recording of instrumental music and a music player

Invite the learners to reflect on touch and how they use touch as a way to express love or affirmation. Ask those who are willing to share their thoughts.

Before reading Luke 7:36–50, define the word “Pharisee” as a member of a group of Jews set apart for strict observance and interpretation of the religious laws. In Jesus’ time, it was a common practice of hospitality to provide water for guests’ feet. This was both a practical activity, as the most common transportation was walking the dusty roads in sandals, and a sign of welcome and respect.

Distribute Bibles and invite volunteers to read Luke 7:36–50. Invite comment on the story. Questions could include the following.

- What did you think of the woman’s behavior toward Jesus?
- How did you feel about Jesus’ response to the Pharisee’s unspoken assumption?
- How did you feel about Jesus’ response to the woman?
- How do you think Jesus felt about having his feet anointed with ointment?

Let the learners know that you have brought oil for them to massage a partner’s hands. If they are not comfortable with this activity, let them know they can opt out as observers who will comment on what they see.

Then invite the learners to pair up. If there is an odd number of learners, you should pair up with someone. Invite each pair to pick up a bowl of water and a towel and to find a comfortable spot. Then have one person of the pair rinse and dry their hands, dry off with the towel, while the other person puts some oil in their hand to offer a hand massage. When they are done, the partners are to switch.

After they are done, invite all the learners to respond.

- How did it feel to have someone else massage your hand?
- What did it feel like to observe this activity?
- Is this a something you could offer or receive at home?
- Did it feel too intimate for this setting?
- Were you moved by this activity?
- What about it moved you?

9 A Fine Wine

Leader preparation: You do not need to be a wine expert for this activity as there will be only basic wine terms used as a springboard to help reflect on honoring the body. If you're interested in learning more about wine tastes and aromas, check out this website: <http://www.wine-tastings-guide.com/tasting-wine.html>.

Do not allow an experienced wine taster to divert this activity. The point of this activity is not the wine but the different senses we use to evaluate wine and how we can apply that to our faith practice of honoring the body.

Read Luke 5:33–39 to become familiar with the story.

Supplies:

- Bible

Ask if there are any wine drinkers among the learners and what their favorite wines are. Talk about how different terms are used to describe wine by using several senses of the body. Explain that at wine tasting events, people will look at its color against a light, smell the bouquet or the aroma of the wine, and then, when tasting, allow the wine to remain on their tongue to get a sense of its flavor first in the mouth and then wait to see what the finish or the aftertaste is like.

Explain that aging and fermentation are also important components in the making of wine. Fermentation allows the natural yeasts to convert the grapes into alcohol, and aging is when the wine is placed in oak casks or steel vats to allow the complexity of the flavors to blend together. Allow comments from the learners, but be attentive to the time. Don't get too distracted or off topic.

Before reading the scripture, remind the learners that the John referred to in this passage is John the Baptist and that the Pharisees are one group of religious leaders for the Jewish people. Read Luke 5:33–39. Ask: *What images or phrase caught your attention? How do you understand Jesus' statement, "no one drinking old wine desires new wine"?*

Bring the conversation around to honoring the body as a faith practice, as you think of the four different ways of experiencing and evaluating wine. Ask these questions to focus the conversation.

- What does honoring the body as a faith practice "look" like?
- How does honoring the body as a faith practice "smell" to other people? (Yes, a bit of humor is always helpful.)
- What does honoring the body as a faith practice "taste" like when you experience it?
- What is the "aftertaste" or "finish" of honoring the body after you are done experiencing it?

Reflect

Were there any surprises during this Exploration? What were they? Was there an area you wished to have covered under traditions that was not covered? How might you bring that concern into future Explorations?

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Seekers and new church participants may be very ready to engage in mission, tasks, and ways of serving others. They may have already been engaged through service either in work or through volunteering with a secular organization. The concept of Sabbath or a day of rest, however, may be more difficult for them to grasp. We live in a technological culture that allows 24/7 accessibility. The Bible teaches us that honoring the body is about finding that balance between serving and resting.

About this Exploration

Since our bodies are temples of God's Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God's grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world. Through our bodies we are invited to serve, responding to human need in all persons. We are invited to help others see the God in them through the presence of God in us. When we love, serve, nurture, and care for one another by respecting and honoring our body and other's bodies, we live out the healthy wholeness that God created us for. Considering the various and diverse contexts in which all live, we learn to choose well between caring for or abusing the body, even as we consider Christian responses to healthy and wholesome as well as violent and abusive living.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Exodus 23:10–12
2 Corinthians 4:13--5:1

Leader Preparation

These activities go in two different directions: (1) a focus on mission and doing things as a service for other people and (2) continuing to care for the body by having enough time to sleep, to dream, to stretch—to just be. With that in mind, you might like to set up a rectangular table in the center of the room. Put mission and work type items on the table, such as maps, globes, work gloves, hard hats, hammer, toolbox, deck of cards, food items. Also put on the table a yoga mat, a pillow and blanket, a dream catcher, and devotional resources.

Prayer: I give you thanks, O God, for all of the energy and doing that it takes to prepare to facilitate this Exploration. I ask that you continue to bless me and that the learners may find their passion and that they may find times of rest through these activities that are offered on this day. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help participants engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Affirmation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Spend thoughtful time reflecting on this key scripture verse: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16 NRSV). Center yourself in this phrase.

Supplies:

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Write 1 Corinthians 3:16 on newsprint or a whiteboard: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” Invite learners to take a few minutes to focus quietly on that verse. Ask the following questions, giving time for reflective answers to each,

- What does this verse make you think about?
- How does this phrase make you feel?
How does it make you want to respond?

Remind the learners that this Exploration is about Context and Mission, and then read the first sentence from About this Exploration above: “Since our bodies are temples of God’s Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God’s grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world.” You might write this on newsprint or a whiteboard so that participants can reflect thoroughly.

Help the learners define “God’s grace.” Give them time to wrestle with this key concept. After their deliberation, offer this: *Grace is God’s gift of compassionate forgiveness and mercy that is available to all when they recognize that they have done wrong and that they are sorry.*

Then ask: *What types of mission do they see in the world around them that are examples of God’s grace and love even though there may not be any use of the word God or any sense of spirituality in these organizations?* Have them name an organization and list how what that organization does that demonstrates God’s grace and love. There are a variety of answers to this—Habitat for Humanity, social work, Red Cross, United Way, Food Pantry, Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

2 Rest and Sleep

Leader preparation: We live in a time that places many demands upon us and our bodies. Many people work salaried positions that require them to put in more than 40 hours a week. With modern technology, we are at the beck and call of bosses or customers—it only takes the touch of a button on our cell phones or laptop computers. At the other end of the spectrum, many people work over 40 hours each week at two low paying jobs simply to be able to afford shelter, food, and insurance. Perhaps these people also continue to put in time job hunting for a position with better pay and fringe benefits.

Supplies:

- Bible

Honoring the Body

SEEKERS & NEW CHURCH PARTICIPANTS

church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

Read Exodus 23:10–12. Ask the learners for questions and comments this passage provokes. Then ask:

- Do we honor the commandment to rest on the seventh day?
- Do I personally honor the Sabbath?
- Does our church honor the Sabbath?
- As a nation, does our country promote the value of rest and sleep?
- If not, what values do we promote? (Efficiency, productivity, and busyness are some sample answers.)

After discussion, share this information: The National Sleep Foundation reported in the results of a 2011 survey that 43 percent of Americans between the ages of 13 and 64 said they rarely or never get a good night's sleep on weeknights, and 60 percent said that they experience a sleep problem every night or almost every night. Watching television has grown to be a near constant before bed over the past 50 years. Now laptops, cell phones, video games, and music devices are rapidly gaining the same status.

- 95 percent of everyone surveyed said they used a television, computer, video game or cell phone at least a few nights a week within the hour before bed.
- 9 percent of young people ages 13–18 said they are awakened after they go to bed every night or almost every night by a phone call, text message, or e-mail.
- 20 percent of people ages 19–29 and 18 percent of young people of ages 13–18 said this happens at least a few nights a week.

Ask for comments regarding these statistics from the National Sleep Foundation. *What reactions does this statement provoke in you?*

Invite the learners to divide into groups of four or five people. Have them talk with one another about the number of hours they work each week, the amount of sleep they get and how much they are affected by modern technology. Give several minutes for this task, reminding them to make sure that everyone in their group has time to talk.

Then draw participants back together in the big group, and ask if anyone wants to share anything from the small groups. *Does this information suggest a remedy? Is anyone thinking about changing life style? Why? How?*

3 Stretching

Leader preparation: Create space for learners to move around. If you are in a room with bare floors, you may wish to have carpet squares, cushions, or yoga pads available for learners to be on the floor for part of this activity. Think about stretching, physically and spiritually, and how it moves us sometimes to places of discomfort. But this discomfort from stretching creates room for laughter and humility as we realize how much more there is to being than always having to be perfectly at ease.

Supplies: None

Invite the learners to be seated and to clench their fists tight and hold. Then invite them to stretch their fingers wide and hold. Next, have them purse their lips as tightly as they can and hold. Then have them stretch their lips as much as they

can in a big smile that shows their teeth. Invite them to share this scary smile with others in the room and enjoy some laughter.

Invite the learners to do the following stretches seated or on the floor. Caution them that they are not to do any movement that will hurt, but to move gently with the stretching. Some sample movements include: touch toes or knees from a standing or sitting on the floor positions, and stretch arms to reach as high to the ceiling as possible from a standing or sitting position.

Reflect with the learners on how it felt physically to clench, then stretch. *How did it feel to stretch out wide?*

Ask: *What might a person's spirituality look like if he or she is clenched?* (Rigid stance about what's right or wrong, living and making decisions based out of fear or anxiety, not willing to listen to or not able to hear another person's story or point of view, and so forth.) Then ask the opposite question: *What might a person's spirituality look like if he or she is stretched?*

After the learners have listed some qualities or characteristics, invite them to name people who have been stretched in their faith. *What can we learn from them? How does being stretched affect our ability to grow personally as well as our ability to reach out and serve other people?* (Better able to do service *with* people rather than *to* people, serving out of humility and graciousness)

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Eternal Weight of Glory (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1. If you're able to find other Bible versions, put these out for reading as it might be extremely helpful in figuring out how to explain the reading for seekers and new church participants.

Across the top of newsprint or a whiteboard write 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1.

Supplies:

- Bibles, variety of versions if possible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Distribute the Bibles. Point out the variety of translations, if available. (If necessary, show them how they can find which version their Bible is. It's usually written on the cover or the spine or both). Let them know that you'll invite people to read the same passage from different versions. As people read, invite attention to the words that seem to keep popping up in the different versions.

Invite the learners to find 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1. Let them know it's in the New Testament. Give them time to find it. Direct them to find the table of contents to aid them and help out as needed. Once everyone has found it, invite one person to read out loud, after identifying the version being read. When the first person has finished, invite a second person, with a different version to read.

Pause after the second reading and invite the learners to name words or phrases that appeared in both versions of the Bible. Write these on the newsprint or whiteboard. Then ask a couple more people with other versions of the Bible to read.

After these readings, add to the newsprint any other phrases or words that were present in all versions. Have the learners focus on verse 17, in particular the phrase “eternal weight of glory.” Ask: *How do you understand that phrase? What does it mean?* Invite discussion and checking out the other translations of that phrase.

Have the learners to turn to John 1:14, and let them read their various versions out loud. *How do you relate this phrase to 2 Corinthians 4:17? How do these readings shape the way we look at honoring the body?*

5 Sitting

Leader preparation: Read the daily devotional from the website “Don’t Just Do Something,” listed in the Supplies. Also read Exodus 23:10–12. Reflect on your own thoughts about “doing” and “sitting” and how you and your culture value either of these.

Set up the room so everyone can see what you project and still have conversation.

Supplies:

- Bible
- projector and screen
- website: “Don’t Just Do Something,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/daily-devotional/dont-just-do-something.html>

Present the website for everyone to read. Invite volunteer learners to take turns reading aloud the paragraphs. Focus on the phrase: “Then there is another saying that holds as much power and vitality, but in our industrious way of life almost sounds offensive: ‘Don’t just do something, sit there.’”

Separate into groups of four or five people to discuss “doing” and “sitting.” Invite the small groups to reflect on these questions:

- When and where are you able to be still?
- Are you able to incorporate times in your life to just sit?
- How does this make you feel?

After this discussion, invite their attention while you slowly and clearly read Exodus 23:10–12. Ask what phrase or word drew their attention. Ask if there are other comments. If they don’t notice it, point out how the verses move us away from having concern for ourselves to having concern for others, including the land, the animals, and the people who are vulnerable in our economy.

In their small groups again, invite participants to take a moment to imagine and then describe to one another what their day of rest might look like.

Bring the large group together again and ask if anyone has anything they’d like to share with the larger group. Then read Exodus 23:12 together.



6 Forming Community

Leader preparation: Think about the qualities it takes to build a healthy community of faith. What attitudes do individuals need in order to create a healthy, body honoring community? What activities can help bring a community together?

Display the two pieces of artwork side by side where they can be easily seen.

Supplies:

- paper and pens, pencils
- artwork: “Out of Work” by Käthe Kollwitz, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- artwork: “Margot Embracing Her Mother” by Mary Cassatt, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401

Invite the learners to study the two pieces of art, noting the differences of moods in each. Then ask for comments describing the moods of each. Then ask them to think about what it takes to form or shape a community. Pass out paper and pens for writing.

As the learners focus on the Kollwitz art, have them imagine the type of community in which this family lives. Have participants write, diagram, or draw the community that they imagine surrounds the people pictured. *What characteristics would describe that community?* Give time to write. After a couple of minutes, ask if they used positive or negative words or images. Why?

Then do the same for the Cassatt art. Imagine the community in which the mother and daughter live. Have the participants write, diagram, or draw the community that they imagine surrounds this family. After a couple of minutes, ask if they used positive or negative words and images. Why?

Invite participants to gather in groups of three or four, taking their pens and papers with them. Ask them to think and write about what makes an ideal Christian community. *What words would describe this community? What traits would best promote this community?*

Draw everyone back together and invite sharing of the traits and qualities that best make up the community they imagine.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Serving with Our Whole Bodies (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: There are many ways to serve with our whole bodies. Examples of activities that potentially draw in the whole self are: taking wheelchair-bound nursing-home residents outdoors to enjoy the flowers while having a conversation with them, being a chaperon for young school-age children on a field activity, volunteering at a local school to listen to children read to help them improve their skill, or being part of a mission trip for a church.

In this activity, work with the learners to figure out how they may focus their time to serve outside of this gathering.

This activity requires doing at least two other activities first.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Gather the learners together and ask what they have learned from previous activities, whether the activities are ones they have participated in today or activities from other Explorations of Honoring the Body. It doesn't matter which activities, but they should be activities that focus on this faith practice.

Help the learners define "mission." Write their definition on the newsprint or whiteboard. After they have defined it, read (or write) part of the paragraph from About this Exploration above.

Since our bodies are temples of God's Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God's grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world. Through our bodies we are invited to serve, responding to human need in all persons.

On another sheet newsprint write: "Serving with our whole bodies." Ask the participants for suggestions of things they might do to help in the town or area in which you live. Some possibilities that exist in your area could be:

- Help with hospice care for a hospital
- Assist with activities at a local nursing home
- Drive local group-home residents to church on Sunday mornings
- Work with Habitat for Humanity
- Purchase groceries and paper products for a Food Pantry
- Volunteer in a soup kitchen
- Walk the dogs at the nearby Humane Society
- Pursue training to serve on the ambulance or fire department
- Rake leaves, weed flower garden or shovel snow for elderly or persons struggling with illness

Invite learners to comment upon the ways of serving that appeal to them. Think together about developing a plan to make one of the ideas happen.



8 Partnering

Leader preparation: In the past, mission was often looked at as something we did to or for people in a foreign country for foreigners. That perspective has changed. Now we do it as partners with people, and it doesn't always happen in a far away country; it can also happen right here within country borders in North American, even within the communities in which we live.

Read Acts 3:1-10 to be familiar with the story. Display the two pieces of artwork in a central location.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Out of Work” by Käthe Kollwitz, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401
- artwork: “Man in a Wheelchair on a Tightrope,” <http://www.art.com/products/p13951106-sa-i2746744/man-in-a-wheelchair-on-a-tightrope.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=wheelchair+and+tightrope>

Invite the learners to spend time contemplating the two pieces of artwork. Post the following statement from the About this Exploration above and read it.

Since our bodies are temples of God’s Holy Spirit, our bodies are extensions of God’s grace and love as we interact with others in our families, communities, and the world.

Ask: In what ways might we assist or partner with the man on the tightrope? In what ways might we assist this unemployed person and family?

Before reading the scripture, let the learners know that this story takes place after Jesus has died and ascended into heaven. It’s about two of his disciples, Peter and John, who continue to share the message of God’s love that Jesus demonstrated to them through his words and lifestyle. Then read Acts 3:1–10 together. Ask the learners to identify what stands out for them in this story.

If they do not mention it, point out verses 4 and 6. In verse 4, Peter asks the beggar to look John and him in the eyes. *Ask: What is the difference between helping a person with downcast eyes and helping a person who is willing to look you in the eye?* In verse 6, Peter says, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you.” *Ask:*

- What personality trait does it take to tell someone what you do not have?
- What is the beggar’s response to Peter’s gift to him?
- In what ways can you give this type of assistance in your own communities?
- What gifts or skills do you have that you can share with people in need?

Have learners brainstorm and share their comments with the whole group.

9 Missions Possible

Leader preparation: There are many agencies and organizations available for people who wish to assist those in need. In this activity, the learners can learn how to connect, including the UCC mission and disaster-recovery website. There are so many areas to serve or volunteer. Go online to check out the UCC website and what the current listings are. If you are part of another denomination or faith community, check its website for similar kinds of help. Think about what agencies in your community might be places through which to serve.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- website: “Disaster Recovery Volunteers,” <http://www.ucc.org/volunteer/disaster-recovery-volunteers/>
- your communion/denomination website
- (optional) phone book

Invite the learners to begin this activity by naming people's basic needs. List these on newsprint or a whiteboard. Then ask: *What groups of people are often unable to meet their basic needs?*

Brainstorm about the different agencies that provide services to these populations; they can name both governmental and private agencies. The business section of your local phone book might help in identifying some services. Often, there are agencies that get overlooked or forgotten, or may not even be known. Some answers could be: nursing homes, assisted living for the elderly or disabled, in-home care, group homes, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, food pantries, Habitat for Humanity, hospice, halfway homes, hospitals, and so forth.

Write the suggestions on the newsprint or white. On that list underline or star those organizations located in your local community. Many of these organizations use volunteers to supplement their paid workers. Have the learners share their knowledge of these things. There is also the possibility of helping out individuals within a community: rake their yard, wash windows, do deep cleaning, shovel snow, wash and set their hair, bake a casserole or make a pan of bars to take over, and so forth.

Then talk about your denomination's long-term disaster-recovery mission possibilities. You might reference the UCC website.

Reflect

What new learning did you gain from these activities? What in this session excites you or draws you to do something new, different? How did the learners demonstrate excitement about the possibilities of different types of services available for them to do?

Honoring the Body



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

There is no particular age group for seekers and new church participants. They may be young adults, older adults who have been away from the church for a long, middle age adults who are facing life transitions and have decided they need a faith foundation. One characteristic they may share is the ability to think outside the box. Honoring the Body as a faith practice often requires thinking outside the box of perceived traditional Christianity. Seekers and new church participants can be excellent resources to help us lift up affirmations of the body as good. These learners, though, may need help in keeping these affirmations connected to a faith language, and they may need help in continuing to critique our culture so that we do not idolize the body above our faith in God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

About this Exploration

The strength gained through honoring the body empowers those who follow Jesus to lead and serve. The fullness of the Body of Christ is contingent upon the ability of humans to appreciate, respect, and celebrate our God-created diversity. Rather than discovering distinction and condemning brokenness, Christians are called to remember our common creation—*imago dei*. In that creation, we celebrate the unique abilities of every person, discovering opportunities to grow, feel, love, and express the fullness of their individual humanity. By claiming our physical bodies as spiritual gifts, we grow as persons and as the children of God, finding wholeness as we grow in our ability to more fully reflect the *imago dei*.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ezekiel 37:1–14
Matthew 22:34–40

Leader Preparation

Create a warm, inviting space. You may wish to have a time of fellowship after this session. Coming together for a meal or for snacks and refreshments can be a great way to honor one another particularly if you are sensitive to individual needs related to diet, nutrition, and preference.

Prayer: We give you thanks, O Holy One, for these days of learning and for affirmation of our bodies in which you have breathed the breath of life. Help me continue to facilitate, to affirm, to encourage and to challenge the learners so that they may continue on this path of faith that you have begun. Through Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine activities that help participants engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities using one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Generosity (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on the broad brushstrokes Christianity receives through the media. How is Christianity generally perceived by church goers and non-church goers? Does our culture paint Christianity as a faith tradition that places major importance on strict moral expectations, but glosses over issues of social injustice? Do our religious leaders, especially those in the media, spotlight present the best “face” to the faith?

This activity uses body language to try to understand what it means to be a Christian who follows Jesus, to be compassionate, and to have a generous faith that aligns itself with social justice issues.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- Bible

Write the phrase “A generous Christianity” across the top of the newsprint paper or white board and invite the learners to brainstorm about this phrase. Let them know that we’re not talking about money. Instead we are talking about lifestyles and attitudes. Write the words or phrases they name. If they seem to get stuck, or if it seems you need to help them get a handle on this, focus on how Jesus was a “generous” person. Generosity is one hallmark of the church. Ask: *In what ways does a generous church look like Jesus?*

Before reading the scripture, invite the learners to clench their fists, bending their elbows and crossing their arms across their body, as if they’re protecting themselves. Imagine fear, a need to protect themselves, to defend, and to be right. Ask: *What facial expression seems to fit most naturally while sitting in this body position?*

While the learners still hold this position, read aloud Matthew 22:36–39. Ask: *What are your thoughts toward your neighbor when you hold this body position?*

Invite the learners to shake out their hands and legs, wiggle their fingers and toes, and relax their facial expression. Have them lean back in their chairs and allow their hands to relax on their laps, palms open and facing up, with their faces tilted toward the ceiling. Ask: *What facial expression seems to belong most naturally when you sit like this?*

Ask them to hold this position while you reread Matthew 22:36–39. Again ask: *What are your thoughts toward your neighbor when you hold this body position?*

Invite the learners to relax. Ask: *What does this activity have to do with being generous?*

2 Spectrum

Leader preparation: Read the lyrics of the song “I Was There to Hear Your Born-ing Cry” and consider the different stages of life that are mentioned. As we look to the future, is there any place that God is not?

The learners will sing the song in this activity. If you’re not comfortable being a music leader, invite someone else to help. Consider whether you want to use an instrument to accompany the singing or to sing a cappella.

- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- song: “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry” by John Ylvisaker (tune: Waterlife), http://www.hymnlyrics.org/requests/i_was_there_to_hear_your_borning_cry.php; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYnmtOI50ic>

Distribute or display the words and invite the learners to study the words and to share any comments they have.

Have them gather into groups of 4–5 people. Small groups give an opportunity for everyone to speak and be heard. In groups, have them describe moments when they were aware of God’s presence. Explain that it doesn’t have to mean that they were aware of God’s presence then and there. It can be a later reflection upon a baptism, a wedding or a funeral when they realized that God had been there. It might have been on vacation when they marveled at a natural scene. Perhaps it was a time when a friend or even a stranger treated them kindly. This activity might encourage the learners to recognize God’s presence in the small everyday occurrences. Allow plenty of time to share.

When you reconvene the whole group, ask if anyone wants to share something that came out of a small-group discussion. Then sing “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry,” or at least listen to the song.

Read aloud these two sentences from the paragraph from About this Exploration above.

The fullness of the Body of Christ is contingent upon the ability of humans to appreciate, respect, and celebrate our God-created diversity. By claiming our physical bodies as spiritual gifts, we grow as persons and as the children of God, finding wholeness as we grow in our ability to more fully reflect the *imago dei*.

Have the small groups talk about the future. In light of this celebration song, what do they imagine a future that honors the body would look like? What will make it different from today? Give them several minutes to brainstorm and then reconvene the large group to share some of their thoughts and conversations.

3 Renewal

Leader preparation: Read Ezekiel 37:1–14 and think about the times in your life when you felt as if your well were dry. How did you get through that time? What helped you?

Supplies:

- video: “Ezekiel 37—The Valley of Dry Bones,” <http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=7D6YWLNX>
- computer with Internet access and projection capability

Invite the learners to think about times in their lives when they have felt dry and parched, spiritually or bodily. Ask: *How important is hope?* Then introduce them to Ezekiel, an Israelite prophet from the fifth century BC, who lived in exile in a country that was not home to him or his people. Ezekiel had a vision about the future of his nation. Show the video. After the video, ask:

- How is this video about hope?
- Have you heard it before?
- What is your reaction to this story?

Invite participants to gather in groups of four or five to talk with one another about the times when they have felt like this valley of dry bones. *What brought you through that time? Where did you find hope?* When the conversation seems to be finished, draw the group back together and ask if anyone wishes to share with the larger group what gave them hope in the midst of tough times.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Reordering (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Jesus' ministry was about reordering the world in order to give priority to love of God and others rather than fear of Rome. In today's world, we may operate out of our fears or our anxieties. What are your fears? Do you base your decision on these fears, or do you make your decisions based on your love for God?

Supplies:

- Bibles

Distribute the Bibles turn to Matthew 14:22–33. Invite volunteer learners to read this story. Ask:

- What in this passage drew your attention?
- Which any words or phrases stood out for you?
- Which scenes struck you?

Focus on verse 26: “And they cried out in fear.” What had happened that made them afraid?

Direct attention to the earlier part of chapter 14:1–21, asking them to be attentive to what else had happened recently that might help us understand why the disciples were operating out of their fear. Invite several to volunteer to read aloud. After they have finished reading, ask what else had happened that would create fear and anxiety in the disciples.

Divide the learners into groups of four or five, and ask them to talk with one another about what they are fearful of in today's world. Their fears can range from small personal things to the political, economic, or environmental climate of the nation or the world. Ask them to keep track of their time so that all will have time to share. Provide plenty of time for this important conversation.

Invite them back to the large group to share anything from their small group gatherings.

Point out that Jesus came into the world to restore hope and to reorder the culture. In this story, Peter tried to get out of his fear by asking Jesus to command him to come to Jesus on the water. But Peter's fears got the best of him, so that he sank. Jesus gave Peter his hand, and Peter was then able to rise above the waves. Ask: *Instead of focusing on the waves or the fear, where does this story tell us to focus? What does this story teach us about hope for the future?*

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 22:36–40. Affirm that love for God and others is the basis of our behavior as disciples of Jesus. Our focus is to love God with the whole self, which includes the whole body.



5 Seeking God's Wholeness

Leader preparation: What do we mean when we say we seek God's wholeness? Does it bring to mind the same image as the phrase "seeking God's kingdom"?

Display "The Public Fountain" artwork where everyone can see it, but keep it covered at the beginning of this activity.

Supplies:

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: "The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1033816467?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- hymn: "Be Thou My Vision," Irish song translated by Mary Byrne (tune: Slane), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XZ3ja-quhA>
- (optional) your church's hymnal, if it includes the hymn "Be Thou My Vision"

Read Matthew 6:25–33 and invite the learners to think specifically about the phrase "to strive first for the kingdom of God." Ask: *What images come to mind when you think of the phrase "kingdom of God"?* Write participants' responses on the newsprint paper or whiteboard. If it is helpful, you might indicate that people increasingly substitute "the reign of God" or "the household of God" for "kingdom" to make it more gender inclusive and more relevant in a democratic setting.

After discussion, uncover the artwork and ask: *In what ways does this artwork portray the kingdom of God?*

After you have moved the paper with the descriptions of the "kingdom of God" images somewhere else, ask the learners what images come to mind when they hear the phrase "seeking God's wholeness," keeping in mind that we are doing the faith practice of honoring the body. Write these images on the newsprint. *Are they different from the images that came to mind from "kingdom of God"? Could seeking God's wholeness mean the same thing as the kingdom of God?*

Introduce the song "Be Thou My Vision," by letting the learners know that the tune was originally an Irish folksong and the original words were part of an Irish monastic tradition from the sixth century. Show the video. If your church's hymnal includes this hymn, have it available for participants to read or sing along.

After the video, ask what other words they would like to add to describe "seeking God's wholeness." Add these words to the newsprint paper or whiteboard. *Does this video change their description of what is meant by wholeness?*

Ask: *What actions might we take to help bring about this image of "seeking God's wholeness"?* Facilitate their brainstorming as a large group and invite all of them to offer ideas. Some learners may suggest church mission ideas, locally or in another state, while others may offer ways of influencing or advocating for governmental structural changes through writing letters to their representatives, and still others may wish to volunteer through a setting supported by the states, such as assisting women leaving shelters to reestablish themselves independently of an abuser.

6 Reimagining Play

Leader preparation: You will need a large space for this activity because of body movement and playing games. Print a copy of Anthony Robinson's daily devotional from August 5, 2011, or have an Internet connection to display it through a projector.

Supplies:

- 1 old double-size flat bed sheet for every 6–8 learners
- “Anthony Robinson’s Daily Devotional,” <http://www.ucc.org/feed-your-spirit/daily-devotional/play-to-the-lord.html>
- 1 tray, a bar of chocolate in its wrappers (could be fair-trade dark chocolate), 1 butter knife, 1 fork, a long scarf, a pair of mittens or gloves, a hat or a pair of loose fitting sunglasses, 2 dice to roll

Divide the learners so there are six to eight in each group. Distribute a bed sheet to each group. They are to spread it completely open on the floor.

Invite the groups to step onto their bed sheets. Their task is to make it as small as they can, not by scrunching it up, but by folding it. They are not allowed to step off of the sheet as they do this. At all times they are to stay on the sheet. They are allowed to talk to one another as they figure out how to accomplish their task.

After everyone has finished, ask:

- Did you enjoy this form of play?
- Did you feel this was a form of play that honors the body?
- What was hard about it?
- What was easy?

Have them to be seated and ask volunteers to read Anthony Robinson’s daily devotion. Invite participants to describe some of their leisure or playtime activities. Ask:

- What leisure or playtime activities are you able to enjoy that do not cost money or cost very little money?
- Do you agree with the statement that play “helps us to manage our destructiveness and rejuvenates the mind”?
- How do you respond to the statement that “play has been co-opted by other industries”?

After this discussion invite the learners to join another game. Place the tray in the center of a circle on the floor. Put the wrapped chocolate bar on it as well as the fork and the knife. Lay the hat, scarf, and mitts on the floor next to the tray. Stand in the center, holding the two dice. Explain the rules of this game:

Players are to roll the dice once on the floor and then pass them to the next person. If a player rolls snake eyes (a pair of ones), he or she is to go into the center of the circle and sit on the floor, put on the hat, wrap the scarf around the neck, put on the mitts, and use the knife and fork to try to unwrap and then cut off chunks of the chocolate bar to eat. That player can work at this until the next person rolls snake eyes. Then that player comes to the center of the circle, grabs the hat, scarf, and mitts to put them on, then takes over with the knife and fork. The game continues until the chocolate bar has been eaten.

If there are people who do not wish to play, have ambulation disabilities, or are allergic to chocolate, let them opt out. They could sit in the circle and, if a person rolls snake eyes, he or she can give his or her luck to a neighbor.

When the game is finished, ask the learners what they valued about these forms of play.

- What does this have to do with honoring the body?
- What does play have to do with the future?
- How are play and imagination connected?
- Can you have a future without imagination?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer Walk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity you will walk through the church building and around the grounds. Make sure that your walk does not disturb any other groups that might be meeting in the spaces where you want to walk. As you walk, imagine what might be possible if we were to more fully honor our bodies and integrate this into the church's worship life, its education life, its fellowship, and its mission.

Is the outdoors inviting for all people? Will people in wheelchairs be excluded from entering? Does the church meet as the church anywhere else besides in its own building? Does it take the message of God's good news out in the practical ways of mission? Is the church only the church when gathered indoors in its own building? What does this say about honoring the body and our place in the natural world?

Supplies:

- "Walking Prayers," Attachment: Activity 7

Invite the learners to get ready for a walking prayer tour. Take them first to the sanctuary and ask them to find a spot to stand or be seated—anywhere in the sanctuary other than where they might normally sit. Have them focus on the doors and the pews, not just the pulpit, font, and table.

- Are the doors able to let a person in with a wheelchair?
- Are the services friendly for the hearing impaired or the mentally challenged?

Ask them for their thoughts and feelings about the sanctuary.

- Does it feel inviting?
- Why or why not?
- Is it a place that honors the body?
- Why or why not?

Offer a prayer. Use the sample on the attachment or offer one of your own. Allow a time of silent breathing.

Then invite the learners to follow you to the education and fellowship areas. Invite them to focus on the atmosphere of the rooms. *Are the rooms well lit, inviting,*

cozy, and warm? Do the rooms look cluttered, untidy, dusty, dark? Let the learners wander into the rooms. If you are in a large church building, you may want to focus on particular rooms to keep the group together. Give them the option of sitting in one area or walking through. Tell them to take a couple of minutes and then invite them to all meet again in a central area.

When they have gathered in the central area, ask them for their thoughts and feelings. *Did the rooms feel inviting? Did they feel like a place to honor the body? Why or why not?* Then offer a prayer by using the sample on the downloadable resource or saying one of your own. Allow a time of silence, breathing.

Then invite the learners to go outside with you.

- Is the outdoors inviting for all people?
- Does the church meet as the church anywhere else other than its own building?
- Does it take the message of God's good news out in the practical ways of mission?
- What does the outdoors say about honoring the body and our place in the natural world?

Again, invite them to wander or sit for a couple of minutes. After a designated time ask them to join you in a central spot. Ask: *Is this a place that honors the body? Why or why not?* Then offer a closing prayer; either the sample on attachment or one of your own. Allow a time of silence, breathing.

Return to your meeting space. Ask:

- What changes do you want to think more carefully about and recommend to church leadership?
- How can we help the church become the kind of place that welcomes all persons and helps to create a new and more hopeful future?

8 Intimacy

Leader preparation: This activity may help the learners to come up with a broad definition of intimacy and to look more closely at different definitions of love.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- paper and pens
- Internet connection

Invite the learners to define "intimacy." Write their definitions on newsprint or a whiteboard. Encourage them to broaden the definition so that it is not confined only to romantic or sexual intimacy between two adults but also inclusive of the intimacy shared between parent and child, brother and sister, or friends.

Write the word "love" on a second sheet of newsprint. In the New Testament there are four Greek words (the primary original language of the New Testament) that are translated into our English word for love. Write these words on the newsprint underneath the word love: *storge, agape, eros, philia*.

Invite the learners to divide up into groups of three or four with at least one person in each group having a phone that can access the Internet. (If you have

computers that are accessible, use those.) Assign one of the Greek words to each group. If you have more than four groups, assign the words more than once.

Give a word of caution to the group(s) receiving the word *eros*. Look carefully at the word and not make assumptions about it because it is so closely related to our English word “erotic.” It means more and is slightly different than our English word.

Pass out paper and pens. Give the groups several minutes to look up their words and define them. Then reconvene the large group and invite each group to define these words for one another. Take time with the word *eros* because it translates so readily into our English word “erotic,” which may have negative connotations for some people. Ask the groups that looked it up to share what it specifically says in its Greek definition.

Discuss intimacy and love and how they are shaped by our faith through our bodies. You could ask questions such as:

- Which Greek definition of love would we use to define our love for children? (*storge*, *philia*)
- What are appropriate ways to share love and touch between parent and child? (*storge*, safe touch)
- Which of these Greek words helps us define our love for God? (*eros*; *agape*)
- What do these words have to do with hope? With the future?



9 Embodiment

Leader preparation: This activity seeks to lift up the myriad ways seekers and new church participants may envision the future of our world. Help them to brainstorm and work to create a community of visioning together.

Display the “Golden Rule” artwork where it is visible to everyone.

Supplies:

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- a variety of magazines with nature scenes and people scenes, artwork boards, scissors, markers, and glue
- artwork: “Golden Rule” by Norman Rockwell, <http://www.art.com/products/p12549842-sa-i1917233/norman-rockwell-golden-rule.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=c5dd66dac7d541809fb8256c7daa3064&searchstring=golden+rule+norman+rockwell>

Read aloud Matthew 22:34–40, and ask the participants what questions or comments they have about this text. After sharing, redirect their attention to the Rockwell artwork and let them study it for awhile. While they are still studying it, reread Matthew 22:39.

Invite them to gather in groups of four or five to describe the characteristics or qualities of living in a community where we love our neighbor. This is a visioning activity. Pass out newsprint papers and markers for them to write their vision.

- What structures and systems need to be in place to help us remember our common creation—made in the image of God?
- Will your community have a name?

- What are some key phrases or words that would define or characterize your community?

After participants have had time to brainstorm in their small groups, give each group artwork boards, markers, access to magazines, scissors, and glue. Ask each group to take the words and phrases they have written on their newsprint and envision their community through images.

Toward the end of this activity, draw everyone back together and have each group share with the larger group the future community they envisioned, describing the images they created.

Reflect

What were your feelings during this Exploration? How did the learners respond? What did you think of the group dynamics during this Exploration?

Attachment: Activity 7

Walking Prayers

Prayer in the Sanctuary

Bless O God, this space. Invite the people who gather here to worship each week to open their eyes, open their ears, and open their hearts to the potential of this space so that it more truly honors our bodies. Remind us again and again of the value of our bodies, of your creation of our bones and muscles, of your life giving breath that keeps our flesh and blood moving. Grant that we may more faithfully follow you in our worship and in our worship spaces. All this we pray through Christ who was born in the flesh of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer in Fellowship and Education Areas

Gracious and life-giving God, we give you thanks for the use of our bodies which can move and speak and hear and touch. Help us to be aware of more ways in which we can use these rooms as places to more fully honor the body as a gift from you, as a vessel of your ever loving, inquisitive Spirit. This we pray to you through Jesus, Amen.

Prayer in the Outdoors

Creator God, we breathe in the air which you have made perfectly to fill our lungs, to give life to our heart and the blood coursing through our veins. Help us, in all aspects of our lives, to be aware of your presence in our flesh. Help us, with Christ as the head of our church, to be more fully aware of your embodied presence in our lives, to be more fully aware of how we can be a church that honors the body. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.